8-2018

Developmental Networks and Interpersonal Support of Beginning Counselors

Nathan Bobby West
University of Tennessee, nwest10@vols.utk.edu

To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Nathan Bobby West entitled "Developmental Networks and Interpersonal Support of Beginning Counselors." I have examined the final electronic copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in Counselor Education.

Joel F. Diambra, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation and recommend its acceptance:

Casey A. Barrio Minton, Elizabeth I. Johnson, Laura S. Wheat

Accepted for the Council:

Dixie L. Thompson

Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

Developmental Networks and Interpersonal Support of Beginning Counselors

A Dissertation Presented for the

Doctor of Philosophy

Degree

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Nathan Bobby West

August 2018

Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my wife, Kate. You inspire me everyday with your compassion for people and commitment to finding and living in truth. You supported me in every way throughout this process and I am so happy to be on this journey with you.

Acknowledgements

I feel immeasurable gratitude to the many people who have influenced and supported me before and during this doctoral process. To my family—I thank God for each of you daily. To Kate, I can't wait to keep growing up with you. To Mom, for fighting to make sure your two kids got what they needed, for showing how much you believed in us, and for making me do my homework—sitting down at the table with me if and when that's what it took. To Dad, for showing me how to enjoy goofing off, working hard, and loving the outdoors (all three of which were pretty heavily involved in writing this paper). To my sister, for keeping me humble, for giving me a place to vent my anxiety on occasion, and for sharing your beautiful family with Kate and me. To Bill and Luane, for being so kind and welcoming to that scrawny kid your daughter brought home and for removing any doubt that I was a part of your family. To my Grandparents. To Papa and Nana, for being so generous for 28 years and counting, for always showing me that you wanted me around, and for never failing to claim me, even when it may have been tempting. To Papa and Mamaw, for teaching me how to be still and for all the peaceful memories sitting on the pond bank, waiting for the catfish to bite.

To my dissertation committee. To Dr. Diambra, for perfectly balancing laid back lunch meetings and firm-handed emails. It was exactly what I needed. To Dr. Wheat, for all the opportunities you have given me over the past few years and for being such a consistent, warm presence on the fourth floor. To Dr. Barrio-Minton, for your words of reassurance and encouragement—they helped me believe that I have something to contribute. To Dr. Johnson, for being a role model in the classroom and the academic setting; and for embodying many of the supportive qualities I've described in this dissertation. To the counselor education faculty as a whole, for believing in me when I was hard-pressed to believe in myself; and for all the ways

you've challenged me to grow over these past four years. To my fellow students, for your friendship, kindness, and support. You made this place a great environment to work (and live) in. I could not have made it this far without your collaborative and welcoming spirit.

To our two dogs, Hugo and Martha, for always being excited to see us walk in the door and making it a little easier to shake off the day's stress. To the random staff member at the Cansler Family YMCA, for asking just the right question at just the right time, and triggering the topic of this dissertation.

Above all to God, for the gift of redeeming love and the powerful potential of human connection; and in whom this process has challenged, changed, and, ultimately, deepened my faith.

Abstract

As beginning counselors leave the structured support of graduate school and enter the workplace, they often experience a turbulent transition (Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2003). Professional and personal relationships play a significant role in counselors' developmental experiences during this transitional period (Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2011). However, few existing research studies examine the experiences of beginning counselors, and studies focusing on developmentally-focused relationships of beginning counselors are even more sparse. The purpose of this study was to investigate and describe the experiences of beginning counselors as they engage in and seek interpersonal supports, including their expressed needs and goals, the makeup of their developmental networks, and their perspective of the professional-social environmental factors influencing their development. I utilized a qualitative content analysis to examine the experiences, garnered using semi-structured interviews, of 12 beginning counselors regarding their developmental networks and interpersonal support. I identified five major themes: *Context of Personal-Professional Identity*; *Adjustment/Transition*; *Growth Orientation*; *Network organization*; and *Connective Tissue*. Findings generally supported conceptualizations of beginning counselors in Ronnestad and Skovholt's (2003) counselor development theory and offered mixed support for constructs within Higgins and Kram's (2001) developmental network model. Implications include recommended methods for counselor educators to promote effective developmental relationships in and outside of the classroom and suggestions for established clinical professionals to foster welcoming workplace environments that ease new counselors' transition from training to practice. I conclude with suggestions for future research.

Keywords: counselor development; beginning counselors; developmental networks; qualitative content analysis

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Chapter One: Introduction

According to the United States Department of Labor (DOL) (2017), the field of counseling is set for significant growth in the near and long-term future. The DOL projects that employment of counselors in multiple specializations, including Mental Health, Substance Abuse, Behavioral Disorder, and Marriage and Family, will increase by 20% from 2016 to 2026. This figure compares to a projected 7% average growth rate for occupations in the US overall. Growth of such magnitude lends importance to the understanding of counselor training and developmental processes.

Counselors' professional development includes, and is in many ways predicated upon, supportive professional relationships, particularly during the transition from graduate school to clinical practice (Gibson, Dollarhide, & Moss, 2010; Moss, Gibson, & Dollarhide, 2014; Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2003; Schwiebert, 2000; Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2011). More specifically, researchers from a variety of fields, including counseling, consider mentoring relationships to be key in addressing the developmental needs of new helping professionals (Kram, 1986; Schwiebert, 2000). Schwiebert noted that positive mentor protégé relationships (MPRs) are associated with important career factors such as higher job satisfaction, higher pay and promotion, and lower levels of work-related stress. Over the past three decades, the focus of mentorship literature shifted from a traditional perspective of dyadic MPRs to models that consider a network of multiple mentors (Carden, 1990; Kram, 1986; Molloy, 2005). The most prominent multiple-mentor model is *developmental network* theory (Dobrow, Chandler, Murphy, & Kram, 2012; Higgins & Kram, 2001; Molloy, 2005). This theory served as a framework for the present study.

The purpose of this research study was to assess how beginning counselors engage in and seek interpersonal supports, including their expressed needs and goals, the makeup of their developmental networks, and their perspective regarding the influence of professional-social environmental factors on their professional development. In this chapter, I introduce the study by briefly outlining the historical context of mentoring and developmental networks, describing the central purpose and questions of the study, and clarifying key language and methods I used in the study.

Historical Context of Mentoring

The term "Mentor" dates back through the ages to Homer's *Odyssey*, naming the man who serves as advisor and guide to Telemachus during his father Odysseus's epic voyage (Anderson & Shannon, 1988; Homer & Fitzgerald, 1990). Between Homer's ancient myth and the present, the role and construct of mentorship occupies literary and historical spaces from the pages of Shakespeare to the forming of American presidents (Eby, Rhodes, & Allen, 2007). Mentorship gained prominence in contemporary scholarly literature during the 1970's, a trend that, as Eby et al. (2007) noted, is widely attributed to the research of Levinson, Darrow, Klein, Levinson, and McKee (1978). Levinson et al. conducted an extensive study on the development of 40 men, ages 35 to 45 and documented the research and conclusions in their book *The Seasons of a Man's Life*. Based on data collected through interviews and observations, the researchers drew a multifaceted framework regarding adult masculine development, including life phases, critical incidents, and relational trends. Levinson et al. (1978) concluded that quality mentoring relationships have immense potential in developmental tasks of career and life. Parallel efforts and support regarding the value Levinson et al. placed on mentoring led to a sharp increase in the attention researchers paid to the subject in the late 1970's and early 1980's (Carden, 1990).

After mentorship's establishment in scholarly literature, professionals from across disciplines worked to define and clarify the concept and operationalize its potential. Theorists stratified roles of mentors, described the diversifying impact of population and setting, and emphasized the fluidity of mentoring based on its equally fluid medium: development (Carden, 1990; Eby et al., 2007). The resources of time and attention provided a rich pool of perspective and language on the concept of mentoring. However, proliferation created new ambiguity, as Eby et al. (2007) pointed out that more than a dozen definitions of mentorship exist across disciplines. The authors noted that definitional disagreements also exist within disciplines and, perhaps most significantly, that every individual mentoring relationship is unique.

Such ambiguity presents a challenge for the purpose of researching and communicating about the construct of mentoring. However, there are thematic elements common to many prominent conceptualizations of mentoring. These components include the notions that mentoring is a purposeful, supportive, growth-fostering process between people that traditionally holds connotations of both developmental mismatch and career orientation (Anderson & Shannon, 1988; Eby et al., 2007; Ragins & Kram, 2007). Put simply, mentoring customarily involves a person who is experienced or advanced in some way lending support to someone with less experience in the same setting or process.

On the broadest level, mentorship researchers typically divide the construct among three categories based on population and setting: youth, academic, and workplace mentoring (Eby et al., 2007; Eby et al., 2013). Each category is distinguished by developmental level and purpose of the relationship. Youth mentoring usually involves adults working with non-relative adolescents for the purpose of promoting resilience and avoiding negative life outcomes (Eby et al., 2013). Academic mentoring includes faculty-student or peer-to-peer (e.g., senior-novice

faculty, senior-novice students) relationships meant to provide a well-rounded and personal educational experience. Finally, workplace mentoring comprises employee relationships aimed at promoting career growth, advancement, and enrichment. Between these three categories, the present study aligned most closely with workplace mentoring relationships, although the study also included relationships extending beyond the immediate work setting. I further describe this distinction later in the chapter.

Mentoring is also commonly classified by the formal or informal nature of the relationship. Eby et al. (2007) noted that formal MPR's are those assigned and/or regulated by an outside organization or individual, while informal MPR's occur organically between individuals. The authors noted that informal MPR's tend to involve stronger social connection and support given their internal motivation and increased likelihood of personality match. Skovholt and Trotter-Mathison (2011) affirmed that compatibility is important and added that it is elusive, asserting that optimal mentoring matches are dependent on chance and often hindered by organizational structures. These conditions suggest that, although formally orchestrated MPRs tend to be less effective than organic relationships, structured organizational efforts to create environments conducive to supportive connections may be worthwhile. In the present study, I considered both formal and informal mentoring relationships.

As the body of research on mentoring continued to grow, substantial emphasis shifted away from single mentoring relationships and toward the consideration of multiple mentor models. This began with Kram's (1986) relationship constellation and model and resulted in developmental network theory (Higgins & Kram, 2001). I describe developmental networks, which will serve as a primary theoretical construct for the current study, in much greater detail in the theoretical framework section of this chapter. The theoretical framework and definition

sections also include further discussion regarding definitional and categorical approaches to the construct of mentoring in this study. In the next section, I discuss supportive relationships within counselor development, including the role of mentoring in the counseling profession.

Supportive Relationships in the Development of Counselors

Throughout the career arc, counselor development occurs in the context of relational networks (Gibson et al., 2010; Moss et al., 2014; Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2003). Counselors encounter supportive relationships through multiple levels of development, with particular emphasis on beginning stages such as education and training. The Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (2016) mandates that students in accredited master's programs in counseling complete extensive practicum and internship experiences before graduation, including at least 700 hours of direct and indirect clinical experiences during which candidates participate in weekly group and individual supervision. After graduation, state licensure boards require new counselors to continue working under the oversight of clinical supervisors as they complete clinical hours for licensure.

The supportive social connections listed above are formal, structured relationships designed to promote integrity and professional identity in individual counselors and the profession as a whole (ACA, 2014). Faculty members, supervisors, and participants in structured peer mentoring programs may all serve in formal supportive roles (Black, Suarez, & Medina, 2004; Walker, 2006). Informal relationships also accompany and foster counselor development. Connections of a personal (e.g., family, friends, or community affiliates.) or professional (e.g., academic or workplace peers) nature may fill these informal supportive roles (Richards, Campenni, & Muse-Burke, 2010; Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2003; Thompson & Thompson, 2014).

Mentor relationships are present across the counseling profession's developmental arc (Gibson et al., 2010; Moss et al., 2014). Mentors help less experienced counselors navigate and adapt through daily challenges as well as broader tasks such as identity development (Moss et al., 2014; Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2003; Woodyard, 2000). While there is little previous research specifically focusing on the nature and functioning of mentoring in counseling, limited existing studies indicate that mentorships built on key principles such as trust, respect, and multicultural competence may have a profound positive impact on counselors' professional development and career fulfillment (Chung et al., 2007; Lee & del Carmen Montiel, 2011; Moss et al., 2014; Terry et al., 2016).

Beginning Counselors

Although supportive relationships, including mentorships, exist throughout counselor development, the present study focused on the period of development immediately following graduation from master's-level counseling programs. Practitioners in this early phase of development commonly encounter a number of unique challenges and experiences. Ronnestad and Skovholt (2003) noted that members of this "novice professional phase" tend to feel overwhelmed by their new, wide-ranging responsibilities and isolated in the absence of structured graduate school support (p. 17). In addition to new independent direct engagement with clients, counselors must learn to manage complicated logistical elements of practice, such as client insurance requirements and state-specific processes for pursuing licensure (Trotter-Mathison, Koch, Sanger, & Skovholt, 2010).

Another significant marker of this developmental phase is a sense of doubt regarding one's ability to perform as a counselor and the adequacy of one's training. As beginning counselors encounter new and difficult tasks, many become frustrated with themselves and their

training program for not preparing them sufficiently (Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2003; Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2011). This experience makes sense given the nature of beginning practitioners' cognitive processes. Etringer and Hillerbrand (1995) noted that novice counselors struggle to recognize how tasks and problems exist within larger systems and patterns and also struggle to smoothly transfer abstract concepts into practice. Put simply, new professionals tend to get lost in unconnected details and find it difficult to apply academic learnings to real world situations. These experiences of being overwhelmed, confused, and frustrated take place in the context of (and, perhaps, due to) *idealistic* expectations of performance, another common trait of novice practitioners (Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2011). In time, these expectations tend to shift to more *realistic* perspectives of performance, success, and growth.

During unique trials and stresses of the novice stage, clinicians often begin to engage in new and deeper levels of self-reflection as they integrate the personal and professional aspects of their experience and identity (Trotter-Mathison et al., 2010). Ronnestad and Skovholt (2003) noted that novice professionals often seek "workplace mentors" to provide stability and support during this time of transition and newfound independence (p. 18). Informal supportive connections with advanced professionals as well as peers may aid beginning counselors as they negotiate developmental challenges (Moss et al., 2014). In particular, Johnson (2007) advocated for clinical supervisors to explore ways to fill this relational role by bringing personal, supportive, and directive qualities of mentorship into their supervision practice. In this way, supervisors can most effectively assist new clinicians in developing a well-rounded professional identity by supporting them through the diverse challenges of transition rather than exclusively focusing on client interactions and issues.

As previously noted, supportive relationships permeate the developmental arc of the counseling professional. Faculty, supervisors, and workplace mentors fill some supportive-relational roles as counselors grow and develop. As I collected and analyzed data in the present study, I considered these professional relationships in addition to other, perhaps less formal or professionally oriented, relationships that may have served as developmental supports for beginning counselors**.**

Supportive Relationships and Counselor Wellness

Beyond development of foundational skills and competencies, supportive professional relationships play a crucial role for counselors in maintaining positive overall health and career-related wellness (Richards, Campenni, & Muse-Burke, 2010; Rosenberg & Pace, 2006; Rossler, 2012; Thompson, Amatea, & Thompson, 2014). Richards et al. noted that both professional and personal relationships are important factors in career satisfaction and the prevention of burnout. Supportive connections such as clinical and administrative supervisors, workplace coworkers, other professionals in the community, and friends and family can promote counselor resilience against substantial negative experiences such as compassion fatigue and vicarious trauma (Rosenberg & Pace; Rossler; Thompson et al.). Additionally, Thompson et al. explained that some researchers have found practitioners newer to the field to be at highest levels of risk for burnout experiences. This indicates that burnout may be a particularly salient concern for beginning counselors and warrants increased understanding of potential preventative factors, such as developmental networks. The following section describes a theoretical framework which I used as a "lens" in approaching the study of beginning counselors' supportive relationships.

Developmental Network Theory as a Framework

Beginning practitioners need developmental support that is multifaceted both in its nature and sources (Schwiebert, 2000). Recognizing this, researchers in the mentorship field have engaged in a paradigm shift over the course of the past three decades, changing from singular mentor-protégé relationship frameworks to broader, multiple-mentor models (Carden, 1990; Higgins, Chandler, & Kram, 2007; Molloy, 2005). Kram (1986) initiated this shift with introduction of the Relationship Constellation, a theory designed to capture the many personal and professional relationships that fill the mentoring role in an individual's life, at once and over time. Family members, past instructors, current workplace peers, and superiors provide unique and overlapping modes of support to a central person (Carden, 1990; Kram, 1986).

After the constellation concept entered the literature, many researchers shifted to this broader view of mentoring, culminating in the conception of *developmental network* theory (Higgins & Kram, 2001; Molloy, 2005). This construct took hold as 1) researchers acknowledged that individuals draw on developmental support from multiple sources; and 2) the emergence of a global economy transformed the workplace into a more transient and multifaceted social structure (Higgens et al., 2007). Higgens et al. noted that the developmental network construct employs concepts from social network theory to approach the field of mentoring and developmental relationships. In this section, I outline the developmental network framework, beginning with Kram's theoretical underpinnings regarding mentorship and supportive developmental relationships.

Kram (1986) postulated that supportive roles take many forms, falling into two general classifications: Career Functions and Psychosocial Functions. Career Functions include support that moves individuals toward corporate advancement and increased career capital (e.g.,

adjustment to tasks and role in workplace, preparation for promotions, and acquisition of new skills). Psychosocial Functions, on the other hand, encourage establishment and increases of self-worth and a sense of identity and competence (e.g., feeling accepted, worthwhile, and confident in one's roles and tasks at work and elsewhere).

Noting the diversity in existing and needed supportive functions, Kram (1986) proposed that a single person or mentor is not typically suited to fulfill all supportive roles at once. Thus, an inclusive constellation model is more adequate in describing the social and environmental context of adult development. The relationship constellation's flexible conceptualization of mentoring relationships may empower practitioners across all developmental stages (but particularly novices) to consider their needs of support and the possible personal resources which may help them meet these needs. This alleviates pressure to fulfill all of one's developmental needs through establishment of a single mentoring relationship, a relationship in which, as noted earlier, organizational structures are often limiting and optimal personality matches are difficult to find (Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2011).

In the past decade and a half, the developmental network perspective took hold as the dominant theoretical orientation in multiple mentor research and added complexity and structure to multiple mentor conceptualization (Dobrow et al., 2012; Molloy, 2005). Higgins et al. (2007) noted that individual networks can be described and studied based on their *diversity* and *strength of ties*. Network *diversity* describes the "range of sources from which individuals receive developmental help" and *strength of ties* relates to "the emotional closeness and frequency of contact" between the individual and each member of the network (p. 349). These fundamental developmental network concepts demonstrate the broad, yet tangible and measurable, structure of the approach that operationalizes it for research practice.

Developmental network theory offers flexibility, applicability to the contemporary workplace, and grounding in the mentoring literature. This combination of qualities effectively fit the present study. The model made it possible to prompt participants to reflect on a wide range of developmental support experiences rather than limiting them to the formal, traditional idea of a singular mentor. Further, the network model enabled me, as the researcher, to construct a grounded data analysis approach that is transparent to participants and readers alike. I further describe the theory and its use throughout the study as part of the literature review in Chapter Two and the data analysis and research methodology discussion in Chapter Three.

Problem Statement

Supportive relationships constitute an important and effective aspect of professional development in a variety of professional fields (Levinson et al., 1978; Schwiebert, 2000). Because counselors grow and develop within an inherently relational context, these relationships have special importance in the counseling profession (Moss et al., 2014; Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2003; Schwiebert, 2000; Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2011; Thompson & Thompson, 2014). Developmentally-focused relationships play a particularly pivotal role as individuals transition from graduate school to clinical practice (Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2011; Trotter-Mathison et al., 2010). Over the past three decades, contemporary research focusing on supportive and mentoring relationships shifted to a multiple-relationships perspective (i.e., developmental networks) (Halvorson et al., 2015; Higgins et al., 2007; Molloy, 2005). Despite this directional shift, there remains a dearth of research on developmental networks in general (Halvorson et al., 2015; Molloy, 2005), and I was unable to find any scholarly works on developmental networks within the counseling field.

Counseling is a relatively young and growing field and, by this nature, counselor development presents a fairly new area of research. Much of the research that does exist relevant to counselor development focuses on counselor trainees during graduate school (Furr & Carroll, 2003; Gibson et al., 2010; Patterson & Levitt, 2012; Prosek & Hurt, 2014), leaving a lack of emphasis in the literature on the developmental process after counseling students complete their master's programs and begin practicing as trained and qualified beginning counselors. Further, there remains little research emphasizing the role of mentoring relationships, and supportive relationships more broadly, within the counseling literature.

To summarize, there is a lack of research emphasis in multiple aspects regarding the subject of beginning counselors' developmental networks. These research gaps include: The experience and relational context of beginning counselors; developmental networks in general and within the counseling field; mentoring and, more specifically, developmental networks in counseling.

Purpose of the Study

In addition to addressing this multilayered gap in the literature, research that explores developmental networks of beginning counselors could offer important perspectives and practical implications for professionals with a vested interest in the development of novice counselors. For instance, counselor educators may use this knowledge to help trainees understand the role of social connections in professional identity and connect with effective relational resources upon entering the workforce. Clinical and administrative supervisors as well as seasoned counselors in the workplace may utilize this information to more effectively support the growth of beginning counselors. Beginning counselors themselves may use this

understanding to take actions that facilitate their own development and growth and that of their peers.

In essence, increased understanding could enable advanced professionals to create networks conducive to developmental growth and empower new professionals to plug in to developmental resources. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to investigate and describe the experiences of beginning counselors as they engage in and seek interpersonal supports, including their expressed needs and goals, the makeup of their developmental networks, and their perspective of the professional-social environmental factors influencing their development.

Statement on Purpose and Method

Much of the existing research on developmental networks is quantitative (Cummings & Higgins, 2006; Dobrow & Higgins, 2005; Higgins, Dobrow, & Roloff, 2010), leaving a lack of data that explicates the texture and depth of personal experiences in these relational contexts. Further, the counseling profession is unique in its personal and relational nature (Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2003), lending particular importance to personal depth in understanding in order to hold salient meaning for both researchers and practitioners. To address this need, I designed the present study in a manner conducive to gathering the voices and perspectives of beginning counselors as they engage in developmental networks. I employed a qualitative content analysis approach to fulfill these desired tasks, as qualitative methods are particularly suited to establish closeness to participant expression and provide deep, textured descriptions of participant experiences (Creswell, 2007; Flick, 2014). In the following section, I provide the research questions that drove the study.

Research Questions

In order to address the purpose outlined above, the study employed the following research questions:

1. How do beginning counselors experience developmental networks?
    a. How do beginning counselors engage in (i.e., actively initiate and/or passively join) developmental network relationships?
    b. How do beginning counselors describe the makeup of their interpersonal supports?
2. How do beginning counselors perceive the role of interpersonal support in their growth as counselors?
    a. What developmental needs do beginning counselors meet or attempt to meet through interpersonal connections?
    b. How might professional-social environmental factors shape (e.g., foster, deter) growth for beginning counselors?

Definitions

In this section, I define key concepts for the present research in effort to clarify and ground the study in its academic and real-world context. These definitions served as consistent meaning markers throughout the conceptualization, data analysis, and data interpretation processes of the study.

Beginning Counselor. This study classified beginning counselors as those who are practicing within approximately two years after graduating from CACREP-accredited master's programs in counseling, with the exception of school counseling. I further discuss the exclusion of school counselors in the Delimitations section. The two-year post-graduation limit is

appropriate for multiple reasons. First, most state licensure boards require that counselors practice for a minimum of two years after graduating from a master's program before being eligible to apply for licensure (ACA, 2016). This requirement assumes two years mark an early, beginning period of development. Further, the American Counseling Association provides professionals within this developmental window with a membership discount, openly acknowledging their novice developmental state. In addition to *beginning counselors*, this study employed other terms to refer to the same population. These terms included novice or new practitioners, therapists, counselors, and clinicians.

Supportive Relationships. *Supportive Relationships* encompassed a broad range of potential relationships, stemming from both professional and personal connections. This broad construct enabled research participants to offer an optimally full and holistic description of their supportive resources and needs. Supportive relationships included, but were not limited to, the constructs of mentoring and developmental networks.

Interpersonal Relationships. *Interpersonal Relationships* served as an even broader construct, encompassing all conceivable connections between persons. I used this term to prompt consideration of phenomena which exist within participants' social realm.

Developmental Network. Higgins and Kram (2001), principal founders of the developmental network model, defined the term as, "the set of people a protégé names as taking an active interest in and action to advance the protégé's career by providing developmental assistance" (p. 268). Chandler and Kram (2005) distinguished this construct from general social networks by noting that the social network "includes all social ties, whereas (the developmental network) includes only those that are identified as of particular importance to career growth and personal learning" (p. 548). For the purpose of this study, the term developmental network

referred to the surrounding people whom a central individual recognizes as actively involved and purposefully assisting in their career development at a given time.

Mentor. While the present study focused on the broader constructs of developmental networks and interpersonal support, the term *mentor* was used to further clarify and ground the study within the context of the empirical and conceptual literature. Use of the term in the literature consistently involves a difference in experience level and an intentional focus on growth of some sort (Dougherty & Dreher, 2007; Ragins & Kram, 2007; Eby et al., 2013). When establishing criteria for mentorship, researchers may specify focus on development in career, psychosocial, or both realms (Dougherty & Dreher, 2007).

For the purpose of this study, the term *mentor* denoted a person who provides encouragement or guidance to a less practiced person (i.e., a protégé) with the intent that the protégé develops in career and/or psychosocial dimensions. Exceptions to this definition, such as peer mentoring, are noted on a case-by-case basis. The definition also applies to the related terms, such as protégé and mentor-protégé relationships (MPRs).

Delimitations

In order to set the boundaries for this study, I limited my investigation to interview data which I gathered from current beginning counselors (i.e., within approximately two years after graduation). I limited the study sample to participants who hold a master's degree from a counseling program accredited by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP), with the exception of school counseling programs. I did not include professionals who hold only a master's degree in school counseling due to differences in training, practice settings, and occupational focus.

I further narrowed my scope of research to participants who had practiced on a consistent basis since graduation, which I defined as those who had not ceased practice (averaging 10 or more hours per week) for a period greater than four consecutive months since graduating from a counseling master's degree program. These criteria promoted collection of data that maintained relevancy to the experience of counseling practice. I also bounded the study with a primary focus on developmental network relationships. These relationships are confined to those the participant deemed beneficial for career growth and development. It is important to note that my study collected data from a small sample of the total population of beginning counselors.

Limitations

There were multiple limitations involved in carrying out and reporting the present study. First, analyzing the data as a single coder limited the possibility for triangulation and diverse perspectives in analysis. A second limitation concerned the individuals who chose to respond and participate in the study. It is possible that counselors who were more actively engaged in the profession were more likely to gain access and respond to the study invitation. Individual counselors who were less connected with other counseling professionals may have been less likely to reach out and express interest, and they may not have been exposed to the study invitation at all. I addressed this limitation by disseminating recruitment materials through a diverse set of administrative channels (academic programs, agencies, and professional associations), which I further discuss in chapter three.

A final limitation in the study related to the lack of existing research on the subject of the developmental networks of beginning counselors. The absence of existing research on this subject prevented me from having a firm sense of context and landmarks by which to navigate research application and interpretation. However, it is my hope that the current study establishes

language and constructs to serve as landmarks for future studies. In Chapter Five, I more thoroughly describe study limitations. I also provide steps I took to minimize limitations and increase the study's rigor.

Organization of Study

I organized this dissertation into five chapters. The first chapter introduced the phenomenon of interest, the purpose and questions central to the study, and major theoretical frameworks influencing the research. In Chapter Two, I provide a review of the literature relevant to beginning counselors, developmental networks, and areas where these two fields of study converge. Chapter Three describes the methods by which I conducted the study, including research foundations and procedures for data collection and analysis. In Chapter Four, I report the study findings, providing descriptions and examples of the five major themes and corresponding coding structures. In Chapter Five, I discuss findings in light of the research questions and two relevant theories. Chapter Five also includes study limitations, final researcher reflections, and implications for counselor educators, supervisors, and other counseling professionals.

Chapter Two: Review of Literature

In this chapter, I provide a thorough review of the literature related to developmental networks of beginning counselors. I begin the chapter by focusing on the development and professional relationships of beginning counselors. Then, I discuss the developmental network literature, including theory and existing research. In the final major section, I describe extant literature connecting mentoring principles and relationships to the counseling profession.

Beginning Counselors: A Developmental Period

The beginning stage of counseling practice is often a turbulent and overwhelming time, characterized by experiences of confusion and anxiety (Ronnesdad & Skovholt, 2003; Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2003; Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2011; Woodyard, 2000). Practitioners in this phase encounter a number of distinct challenges and deeply felt needs. These experiences are situated in a larger developmental context, between formal training and independent practice. In this section, I briefly discuss some major constructs in counselor development. Then, I provide a more extensive discussion of the developmental period specific to this study: the two-year period following graduation from a master's degree in counseling program.

Major Principles in Counselor Development

In order to understand basic concepts of counselor development, I examined two major theoretical and research perspectives for prominent and/or overlapping developmental principles (Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2003; Stoltenberg, 2008). Skovholt and Ronnestad (1992) conducted a large study based in grounded theory and involving 100 participants labeled *counselors* and *therapists*. Participants in the study ranged across the career span, from new trainees to individuals with several decades in the field. Researchers utilized in-depth interviews with all 100 participants, conducted initial analysis procedures, then re-interviewed 60 of the participants.

From this work, the researchers produced a stage model and 20 themes regarding the development of counselors. They published multiple subsequent works based on the data from the original study (Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2001; Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2003). After follow-up interviews with participants from the original study, the researchers updated the model to a phase model and condensed developmental themes to 14 based on new professional insights and experiences (Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2001; Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2003). I further discuss Ronnestad and Skovholt's (2003) model in the following subsections and again later in the chapter, as I review conceptual works that focus on beginning counselors.

Stoltenberg (2008) presented the Integrated Developmental Model (IDM), a widely accepted and research-based developmental model for counseling supervision. The IDM contains a stage model along with characteristics of developmental milestones. The IDM is narrower in focus and scope than the model proposed by Skovholt and Ronnestad (2003), as the IDM focuses exclusively on early counselor development in the specific context of the supervisory relationship. I considered the works of Skovholt and Ronnestad (2003) and Stoltenberg (2008) to be meaningful for the present study based on their widespread acceptance in the counseling profession, depth in describing counselor developmental processes, and diversified lenses. These two primary sources inform the following themes of counselor development.

Growth depends on relationships. Both the IDM (Stoltenberg, 2008) and Ronnestad and Skovholt's (2003) model elevate interpersonal relationships to an essential level of importance. Stoltenberg described the necessary role of supervisors and other professional guides as they take intentional approaches to meet trainees at their current developmental levels. Depending on supervisee needs, this guiding role may necessitate supportive, reflective interactions or more direct challenges prompting immediate growth. Speaking more broadly,

Ronnestad and Skovholt (2003) found that participants considered professional and personal relationships to be more impactful for growth than concrete, "impersonal" information (e.g., research, theoretical information) (p. 35). Growth-inducing relationships included those with clients, faculty, supervisors, mentors, peers, and personal-social connections such as friends and family. Skovholt and Ronnestad (1992) further noted that interpersonal and concrete growth are significantly interwoven, as acquisition of "theory and research is often mediated" through professional relationships (p. 512). It is within a context of interpersonal connections that counselors learn and proceed through the following two themes: *increased awareness is necessary for growth* and *development involves a shift toward integrated self and internal drive*.

Increased awareness is necessary for growth. The two models acknowledge the necessity of intra- and interpersonal awareness for counselor growth. The IDM cites awareness as a principle construct for describing and identifying counselor growth (Stoltenberg, 2008; Stoltenberg, McNeill, & Delworth, 1998). The IDM displays a developmental trajectory wherein beginning counselors experience an unhelpful preoccupation with self (e.g., internal thoughts, apprehensions, hopes), develop an increased capacity for focusing on clients' issues and in-the-moment experiences, and finally acquire a more holistic focus on experiences of both client and self. This transformation marks the complex developmental process of the first few years of counseling practice (Stoltenberg, 2008).

Ronnestad and Skovholt (2003) asserted that active personal reflection and resultant increases in awareness are essential to ongoing growth throughout the counseling career, citing career stagnancy as the potential alternative. The authors noted that a "stimulating and supportive work environment" is important for counselors to maintain growth in awareness over time (p. 30). Ronnestad and Skovholt wrote that, in addition to awareness of personal experience and

growth, counselors need also to be aware of their professional capacities and limitations as well as clients' needs and experiences. Reflection and increasing awareness enable counselors to facilitate the developmental shift constituting the next and final theme.

Development involves a shift toward integrated self and internal drive. Both models assume that counselor development involves a strengthening sense of identity growing from within the counselor, though the models describe this process in different terms. Using the IDM, supervisors assess the development of supervisees based, in large part, on their level of autonomy. Stoltenberg (2008) wrote that novice counselors experience high levels of apprehension and dependence on external authority figures. As counselors develop, elements of practice begin to feel more natural, and they increasingly trust their own knowledge and intuition.

Ronnestad and Skovholt (2003) described a similar developmental shift, noting a change from "external" to "internal expertise" (p. 30) and a gradual "integration of the professional self and the personal self" (p. 27). As counselors develop, they form a comprehensive identity wherein their personality, natural abilities and intuition, and knowledge base work seamlessly together across multiple elements of counseling practice. This change involves a lessening dependence upon external forces as internal trust increases.

These three layers of development—professional and personal relationships, intra- and interpersonal awareness, and increasing internal trust and integration of self—permeate the growth of counselors across the career span (Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2003; Skovholt & Ronnestad, 1992; Stoltenberg, 2008; Stoltenberg et al., 1998). The following section focuses specifically on the developmental context of beginning counselors.

Beginning Work in the Counseling Field

The years immediately following graduate school for beginning counselors are marked by unique characteristics and experiences. Most counselors enter the workplace feeling excited and eager in their new freedom, but they often are surprised by challenges and self-doubt they quickly meet (Moss et al., 2014; Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2003). In a personal reflection on this developmental period, Brinson (1999) likened entry into counseling employment to a "traumatic birth experience" that propels graduates into an exciting, yet frightening, world and produces the need for parental figures to help navigate delicate political landscapes and demanding responsibilities (p. 165). This unique developmental period is potentially pivotal for the long-term growth and development of counselors (Duggal & Rao, 2016; Theriault, Gazzola, & Richardson, 2009). However, few existing empirical studies examine the experiences of counselors in the years following graduate school.

In this section, I review studies that do focus on counselors in this transitional phase. I reviewed the empirical work of Ronnestad and Skovholt (2003) in the previous section of this chapter. In addition to Ronnestad and Skovholt's research, I identified three empirical articles which I review in the following paragraphs. The scarcity of research on this developmental group affords the feasibility for me to describe the approach and findings of each study. Before I examine these empirical articles, I discuss the conceptual contributions of Ronnestad and Skovholt (2003) (i.e., elements of their model focusing on beginning counselors) and two additional conceptual works that center on the challenges facing beginning therapists. I close the section by integrating the conceptual and empirical works into a blended conceptualization.

Conceptual works on beginning counselors. As discussed earlier in this chapter, Ronnestad and Skovholt (2003) proposed and updated a model of counseling development based on their extensive research. In this section, I further discuss the updated model, with special focus on the portions that pertain to beginning counselors. Ronnestad and Skovholt (2003) referred to the developmental period immediately following graduate school as the Novice Professional phase. The researchers asserted that counselors at this period typically progress through three stages: "*Seeking confirmation*; *disillusionment*; and *exploration*" (p. 17). First, newly graduated counselors attempt to "*confirm* the validity of their training" (p. 17). These counselors attempt to fit complex client issues into overly simplistic theoretical conceptualizations gleaned from their academic training. When actual experiences fail to meet these expectations, the counselors enter the second stage, "*disillusionment* with professional training and self" (p. 17). Third, these counselors respond to the difficulties they encounter by engaging in a deeper "*exploration* into self and the professional environment" (p. 17). Ronnestad and Skovholt noted the importance of professional connections throughout this process—relationships with clients, peers, and mentors mitigate new counselors' growth through this challenging and often isolating time.

Skovholt and Ronnestad (2003) and Skovholt and Trotter-Mathison (2011) drew from empirical research, developmental theory, and experience to outline common struggles of beginning counselors and helping professionals. Skovholt and Ronnestad (2003) provided the following seven major stressors faced by novice professionals: "Acute Performance Anxiety and Fear; Illuminated Scrutiny by Professional Gatekeepers; Porous or Rigid Emotional Boundaries; The Fragile and Incomplete Practitionerself; Inadequate Conceptual Maps; Glamorized Expectations; The Acute Need for Positive Mentors" (pp. 47-54). The authors explained that a

sense of ambiguity in roles and tasks is foundational to these challenges. The counseling field is unique in this sense, as the inherent nature of therapeutic practice is gray and, at its best, intuitive (i.e., clear-cut answers and singular 'right' decisions are rare) (Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2003; Skovholt & Ronnestad, 2003). In the autonomy of practice, new counselors are frequently surprised by the silence of their instincts and insecure about their lack of practical knowledge.

A theme of interpersonal relations also runs through the authors' seven stressors, as at least three of the stressors directly relate to connection with others (i.e., scrutiny of gatekeepers, emotional boundaries, and need for mentors). Relationships with authority figures (e.g., faculty, supervisors, employers, etc.), role models, peers, and clients largely govern beginners' confidence level, comfort, and growth. Skovholt and Ronnestad (2003) particularly emphasized the complex role of clients in early counselor development, referring to them as "primary teachers" through whom beginning therapists lose their "professional innocence" (p. 46). In all, the authors presented this developmental period as a daunting time of volatile confidence and oscillation between running into barriers and growing rapidly.

Skovholt and Trotter-Mathison (2011) offered a similar conceptualization of surprising and often exasperating challenge in the early years of counseling practice. The authors highlighted that counselors experience a feeling of powerlessness as they transition from an academic context, where they experienced success and mastery, to the ambiguous landscape of practice, where they feel ineffectual and unprepared. Academic learning and real-life clinical experience seem irreparably disconnected and beginning counselors become disillusioned with themselves, their training, or both. It is in this experience, the authors asserted, that novices need mentoring support utilizing the "uncertainty/certainty principle of practitioner development" (p. 88). The uncertainty/certainty principle involves developmental guides using a mix of questions

and answers to demonstrate that while practice is ambiguous and singular *right* answers are rare, there are tangible approaches, tools, and techniques with which to anchor oneself. The authors argued that this form of interpersonal guidance is crucial for optimal novice development.

Both Skovholt and Ronnestad (2003) and Skovholt and Trotter-Mathison (2011) described expectations as an important feature of the novice's transition from graduate school to clinical practice. Beginning practitioners demonstrate a tendency toward "glamorized" (Skovholt & Ronnestead, 2003, p. 53) or "idealistic" (Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2011, p. 93) expectations based on their in-school achievements and observation of the inspiring success of their role models. Due to these lofty expectations, beginning counselors perceive imperfect efforts as immense failures, adding to their frustration and sense of incompetence. Through experience and development, counselors begin to replace idealism with a more accurate perspective and accept the complex process of growth. I further discuss these conceptual works in the blended conceptualization subsection later in the chapter. In the following paragraphs, I describe existing empirical studies on beginning counselors.

Empirical studies on beginning counselors. Theriault et al., (2009) utilized grounded theory methods to investigate experiences and effects of "feelings of incompetence" in novice counselors (p. 106). The researchers engaged in semi-structured interviews with 10 recent graduates (within one to five years) of masters in counseling programs. Feelings of incompetence had positive and negative effects for novice counselors. The experience often increased anxiety while also facilitating self-awareness helpful for growth. Effects were, to some degree, mitigated by connections with others. Feeling alone exacerbated anxiety and disconnection from clients, while connection with clients and other professionals fostered growth. Open communication with other professionals was particularly helpful in coping with feelings of incompetence. Supervisory

relationships were hindered by their evaluative nature, as participants expressed being afraid to admit their flaws and fears to supervisors.

Duggal and Rao (2016) also examined difficult aspects of the early years of counseling experience, as they used a mixed-methods approach to study challenges facing beginning counselors in India. The researchers acquired questionnaire responses from 30 new professionals and engaged in qualitative interviews with six of the original 30 participants. Participants indicated intrapersonal struggles such as a sense of incompetence and inability to adjust to demanding work settings as well as interpersonal challenges such as isolation and a lack of adequate support from supervisors or other counselors.

Bischoff, Barton, and Thober (2002) engaged in a qualitative study of marriage and family therapists in their first year of direct client contact during the clinical practicum portion of their training programs. Bischoff et al. examined the "external events and experiences" affecting the confidence of new practitioners (p. 372). Using semi-structured interviews, the researchers collected data from 39 graduates from marriage and family therapy master's programs. Results indicated that confidence developed as counselors built a wealth of clinical experiences from which to draw perspective. This concept is akin to what Ronnestad and Skovholt (2003) referred to as *accumulated wisdom*. Bischoff et al. further described four "event categories" as key factors for the development of new practitioner confidence: "clinical contact, supervision, contact with peers, and personal life stress" (p. 374). Each of these factors significantly relates to interpersonal connections of the practitioner.

Theriault et al. (2009), Duggal and Rao (2016), and Bischoff et al. (2002) all studied the challenges and confidence of beginning counselors. While the authors differed in method, population demographics, and geographic location, the findings of these three studies held in

common that interpersonal relationships play a significant role in the growth and development of beginning counselors. These findings are consistent with those of Ronnestad and Skovholt (2003) and support the need for research focusing on the interpersonal relationships of beginning counselors. In the following paragraphs, I discuss and evaluate these empirical studies alongside the conceptual works I reviewed in the previous section.

Blended conceptualization. In this section, I combine the findings and meanings of the empirical and conceptual articles I reviewed above to offer a blended conceptualization of beginning counselors. Reviewing the literature on beginning counselors, I identified two major themes pertinent to the experience of this developmental period: *Transition* and *connection*. First, immediately following graduate training, counselors experience a significant *transition* and period of adjustment (Duggal & Rao, 2016; Skovholt & Ronnestad, 2003; Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2011; Theriault et al., 2009). Ambiguity and confusion mark early counseling experiences, as the world of practice presents as more complex than graduates anticipate (Skovholt & Ronnestad, 2003; Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2011). Beginning counselors often feel unprepared for the demands of daily practice, initiating a sense of powerlessness, self-doubt, and frustration with training (Duggal & Rao, 2016; Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2003; Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2011; Theriault et al., 2009).

In time, difficult feelings and experiences tend to give way to new growth and insights (Bischoff et al., 2002; Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2003; Theriault et al., 2009). Feelings of incompetence had both positive and negative effects on study participants—with positive effects including the prompting of new self exploration and discovery (Theriault et al., 2009). Biscoff et al. (2002) and Ronnestad and Skovholt (2003) described a similar process whereby clinicians who have had some time in practice tend to draw on previous struggles to address and overcome

present challenges, creating a continuous, snowballing cycle of learning and growth. Shifting expectations play an important role in this process, as new counselors must accept themselves as imperfect and development as an ongoing journey (Skovholt & Ronnestad, 2003; Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2011). The next theme describes the layered interpersonal context in which counselors engage in the transitional process of early practice.

Comprising the second theme, beginning counselors' experiences are largely based in and shaped by interpersonal *connections* and contact (Bischoff et al., 2002; Duggal & Rao, 2016; Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2003; Skovholt & Ronnestad, 1992; Skovholt & Ronnestad, 2003; Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2011; Theriault et al., 2009). Connecting with others is important for maintaining wellness and managing the trials of early practice (Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2003; Skovholt & Ronnestad, 2003; Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2011), yet new practitioners commonly experience a powerful sense of isolation due to their new independence (Duggal & Rao, 2016; Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2003; Skovholt &Ronnestad, 2003).

New counselors experience several different types of relationships, with each having unique characteristics and needs. They need and seek personal and professional support from multiple sources: peers, supervisors, and others in the workplace (Bischoff et al., 2002; Brinson, 1999; Ronnstad & Skovholt, 2003; Skovholt & Ronnestad, 2003). Many counselors experience difficulty in accepting this support from supervisors due to the evaluative nature of this relationship, increasing the risk for isolation if other supportive connections are not readily available (Duggal & Rao, 2016; Skovholt & Ronnestad, 2003; Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2011).

In addition to supportive relationships, relationships with clients play an important role in counselor development (Bischoff et al., 2002; Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2003; Skovholt &

Ronnestad, 1992; Skovholt & Ronnestad, 2003). Interactions with clients can challenge counselors to deeper levels of self and other exploration and foster continual growth (Bischoff et al., 2002; Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2003). Literature on healthcare burnout confirms the importance of the practitioner-client relationship, as Maslach, Schaufeli, and Leiter (2001) considered *depersonalization* (process of the practitioner disconnecting from clients/patients) one of the three core dimensions of burnout. The multifaceted and essential interpersonal context of beginning counselors makes connection a crucial consideration in studying this developmental period. In the next section, I explore the specific developmental relationship between beginning counselors and clinical supervisors.

Clinical Supervision of Beginning Counselors

As illustrated in the previous section, the challenges of beginning counselors are rooted in the uncertainty of new roles and tasks and navigated largely through interpersonal connections (Brinson, 1997; Skovholt & Ronnestad, 1992; Skovholt & Ronnestad, 2003). In this section, I discuss a particular and prominent relationship in early counselor development: clinical supervision. I provide a brief overview and history of clinical supervision's role in the counseling profession, discuss potential limitations of the supervisory relationship, and examine some attempts in the literature to address supervision limitations.

Overview and History of Supervision in Counseling

Leaders in the counseling field acknowledge and address the need for developmentally-focused interpersonal connections in early counselor development. Supervision serves as the primary method of addressing this need after completion of masters-level training (ACES, 2011; Borders et al., 2014). In an extensive report on professional counseling licensure in the United States, the American Counseling Association (2016) documented that professional counseling

licensure processes in all 50 states, plus Puerto Rico and the District of Columbia, require some amount of supervision to coincide with post-masters clinical experience.

The universality of supervision as a requirement of post-master's counselor development fits within the larger historical and political context of the counseling profession as a whole, a context worth noting for the purpose of this literature review. Lawson (2016) wrote that the past half-century has marked a long, difficult road for the counseling profession to establish and distinguish itself as a unique fixture in the helping fields. A central part of this effort includes the formation and legitimization of state licensure and consistent standards of clinical training and supervision.

To this end, the Association for Counselor Education and Supervision (2011) adopted a set of *Best Practices in Clinical Supervision*. The *Best Practices* represent efforts to mobilize the existing research, knowledge, and ethical standards regarding counselor supervision and training, making this information accessible to practitioners and researchers alike (Borders et al., 2014). The authors of the *Best Practices* document differentiated *clinical supervision* from *administrative supervision*. Administrative supervision involves emphasis on practical and workplace-centric aspects of counseling employment and service, while clinical supervision involves "the supportive and educative activities of the supervisor designed to improve the application of counseling theory and technique directly with clients" (p. 1). In other words, clinical supervision focuses primarily on the process of engaging and working with clients. The *Best Practices*, as well as state licensure requirements, speak primarily in regard to clinical supervision.

Challenges and Limitations in Clinical Supervision

The role of clinical supervisor is multifaceted and demanding (ACES, 2011; Borders et al., 2014; Pearson, 2000). The ACES (2011) *Best Practices* note that supervisors assume a wide range of roles, "including teacher, counselor, consultant, mentor, and evaluator" (p. 3). The inclusion of potentially conflicting roles, such as supporter and evaluator, and the power differential inherent to supervision can create tension and confusion in the supervisory relationship (ACES, 2011; Pearson, 2000). The nature of supervision also creates an ultimate concentration on clients' wellbeing and development, rather than that of the supervisee (ACA, 2014; ACES, 2011; Pearson, 2000). Finally, a single relationship is not capable of filling all of the needs of an individual practitioner (Higgins et al., 2007; Molloy, 2005). In the paragraphs below, I discuss these four challenges (i.e., evaluation, power differential, client-focus, and single relationship) in greater detail.

Evaluation. Supervisor evaluation can be a powerful and delicate force in supervision (ACES, 2011; Bischoff et al., 2002; Pearson, 2000; Theriault et al., 2009; Watkins, 2012). Theriault et al. (2009) noted that student participants hid their feelings of incompetence from supervisors due to fear of negative assessment. Participants in the Bischoff et al. (2002) study expressed that when supervisors neglected to communicate positive performance evaluations, they experienced significant drops in confidence. While supervisor evaluation is a sensitive and potentially difficult experience for supervisees, leading authorities in the counseling field maintain that evaluation is a necessary and important part of both supervisory relationships and counselor development (ACES, 2011).

Counselors first encounter supervisor evaluation in graduate school, where grades and formal approval depend upon evaluation of counseling practice (Pearson, 2000). Once they enter

the workforce, counselors experience supervisor evaluation as they seek reference letters for employment, certification, licensure, and other milestones. Both ACES (2011) and Pearson (2000) asserted that supervisors should handle evaluative procedures with great care and concern. Both sources encouraged supervisors to acknowledge the existence of evaluation with supervisees, normalize experiences, and balance evaluation with expression of support. These messages blend well with the findings of Bischoff et al. (2002) and Theriault et al. (2009). Bischoff et al. noted that supervisor critiques were ultimately helpful and necessary for growth when they were accompanied by messages of support. Further, participants who hid their anxiety from supervisors stated that they wished supervisors and faculty members would normalize these thoughts and feelings and open the door for discussing feelings of incompetence (Theriault et al., 2009).

Power differential. Supervisory relationships inherently involve differences in power (ACES, 2011; Bischoff et al., 2002; Pearson, 2000; Theriault et al., 2009; Watkins, 2012). The challenges of evaluation are rooted in this core issue of power. Supervisors' words and tone carry impactful meaning for counselors, perhaps beyond what supervisors realize. Bischoff et al. (2002) noted that participants often hinged on the words of supervisors and felt as impacted by what supervisors *did no*t say as what they did say--reinforcing the delicacy of the supervisory role. Similar to the issue of evaluation, the ACES (2011) *Best Practices* stress that supervisors should be aware of differences in power, acknowledge its existence with supervisees, and work through it to establish trust in the supervision relationship. The *Best Practices* also state that supervisors are responsible for giving supervisees a voice in the relationship—empowering them to develop autonomy and shape the focus and direction of supervisory work, as is appropriate.

Client focus. Although the supervisory relationship serves the purpose of counselor growth and development, the ACES (2011) *Best Practices* state that "client welfare is (the supervisor's) first and highest responsibility…" (p. 10). The ACA (2014) *Code of Ethics* also communicates this point, calling client welfare "a primary obligation" of supervisors (p. 12). This principle can potentially create a conflict with the focus on supervisee development. Pearson (2000) noted that, although the goal of client welfare typically overlaps with the goal of supervisee development, some instances may cause supervisors to temporarily set aside the focus on counselor development in order to consider the wellbeing of the more vulnerable individual, the client. An established loyalty outside of the supervisee's growth and development makes supervision unique in the realm of developmental relationships, and may serve as a limitation in support.

Single relationship. The supervisory challenges of evaluation, power differential, and client-focus inform a fourth, broader, challenge in supervision—the insufficiency of a single developmentally-focused relationship to meet all of the needs of an individual professional. As I discussed in Chapter One, professional development scholars have embraced the importance of multiple-supports in recent years (Higgins et al, 2007; Molloy, 2005). Counselors grow in the context of many relationships, including those with peers and other professionals (ACA, 2014; ACES, 2011; Bischoff et al., 2002; Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2003). Pearson (2000) noted the common challenge of transference issues in supervision, and offered the example of a supervisee who experiences supervisory evaluation as "the overly critical, demanding parent" (p. 286). To take this parent-child analogy further, I assert that as multiple relationships inform and influence counselors' development, these relationships supplement the supervisory role much in the same way extra-parental relationships (e.g., peers, family members, and other adult figures) inform

and influence adolescents. In the following section, I discuss several articles focused on addressing these and other challenges and enhancing the practice of supervision.

Addressing Supervision Challenges

A number of works in the literature acknowledge the challenges inherent to clinical supervision and offer potential means of addressing these challenges (ACES, 2011; Lenz & Smith, 2010; Pearson, 2000; Ward & House, 1998; Watkins, 2012). I first discuss a common thread running throughout each perspective: a heavy emphasis on the supervisory relationship. Then, I discuss three specific perspectives of addressing these challenges by offering psychosocial support in supervision.

Emphasis on relationship. As discussed throughout the prior section, researchers and authorities in the counseling profession emphatically advocate for supervisors to focus on building a strong, trusting relationship with supervisees (ACES, 2011; Pearson, 2000; Watkins, 2012). A solid supervisory alliance is a first-line defense against potential negative consequences of the challenges discussed above. Many authors noted that a healthy supervisory relationship requires the supervisor to initiate difficult, often uncomfortable conversations, including open discussion of supervisor evaluation and power differential as well as supervisee clinical struggles, perceived failures, and feelings of inadequacy (Pearson, 2000; Theriault, 2009; Ward & House, 1998; Watkins, 2012; Young, Lambie, Hutchinson, & Thurston-Dyer, 2011). These authors hold a virtual consensus that engaging in this type of vulnerable, open dialogue within an established safe space not only diminishes the negative impact of evaluation and power, but actually enables the presence of evaluation and power to play a beneficial role in counselor development. In the following paragraphs, I briefly discuss three individual approaches to creating a supervision relationship wherein supervisees receive holistic, psychosocial support.

Supervision models including psychosocial support. Ward and House (1998) presented a reflective model of supervision, applying principles of reflective learning theory with research-based concepts of counselor development. From the authors' perspective, reflective supervision involves supervisors continually challenging supervisees to use critical thinking and reflect on their limitations, strengths, and goals for growth. The model encourages supervisors and counselors to not only acknowledge counselors' insecurities and doubts, but to intentionally explore them--to go to the frightening places together. According to this theory, it is in a holistic supervision experience that true learning and growth occurs. This process requires that a strong trust exist between supervisor and supervisee. The emphasis Ward and House placed on open, vulnerable dialogue addresses the wishes of the Theriault et al.'s (2009) participants--that supervisors would acknowledge and normalize supervisee doubts and feelings of incompetence.

Young et al. (2011) proposed a reflective, developmental model of supervision. Like Ward and House (1998), these authors emphasized the importance of a sound supervisory alliance, referring to this alliance as the primary and foundational piece of effective supervision. Young et al. also included processes and strategies for open, vulnerable reflection and a holistic balance of psychosocial and practical focus in supervision. Young et al. differentiated from Ward and House in their incorporation of a developmental lens. The authors used concepts from the IDM and other research and theoretical sources to form a new model of supervision. The authors outlined a detailed supervisory process involving establishment of the supervision relationship, assessment of supervisee developmental state, and application of supervision interventions intended to meet supervisees at their developmental level. The authors provided specific resources for application of their model, including an assessment tool for evaluating supervisee developmental level and specific recommendations for addressing transference and

countertransference issues, attending to parallel process, and demonstrating multicultural competence.

Lenz and Smith (2010) introduced the Wellness Model of Supervision (WELMS). The authors also noted that a strong, trusting supervisory relationship and warm supervision setting are essential for effective implementation of their model. The WELMS is unique in its inclusion of wellness as a "central construct" of supervision (p. 234). Lenz and Smith based this model on research, definitions, and theories of wellness in the counseling literature. Using the WELMS, supervisors assist supervisees in developing their own informed conceptualization of wellness--as it pertains to the lives of both supervisees and their clients. Supervisors then help supervisees gauge their own levels of personal wellness using formal and informal techniques and co-create plans for increasing supervisee measures of wellness. Supervisors and supervisees engage in ongoing evaluation of client and supervisee wellness as those plans are implemented. The authors asserted that lending primary focus to supervisee wellness will positively affect supervisees' ability to care for clients, as they believe improving quality of life in one domain impacts all other domains. Essentially, wellness acts as a primary lens through which the supervisor engages all other decisions and processes.

Although differing in specific focus, technique, and terminology, the supervision models set forth by Ward and House (1998), Young et al. (2011), and Lenz and Smith (2010) both emphasize 1) the essential and primary role of the supervisory relationship and 2) the importance of intentionally offering psychosocial support to supervisees. These three models may serve as resources when supervisors encounter the challenges discussed in the prior section. The approaches address challenges of evaluation and power differential through implementation of an open supervision environment where supervisees feel safe to be vulnerable. The authors

address the challenges of client-focused relationships by making significant room for counselor concerns (e.g., collaborating on client wellbeing, trusting that counselor growth will benefit client care). To some extent, they mitigate the limitations of supervision as a single relationship by intentionally promoting a balanced process of both career and psychosocial support (Kram, 1986; Lenz & Smith, 2010; Ward & House, 1998; Young et al., 2011). By integrating both of these functions, supervisors may strengthen and expand the impact of their work with supervisees. Increasing the effectiveness of this relationship is extremely important as it serves as the primary developmental relationship for counselors after graduation (ACES, 2011; Borders et al., 2014).

Although the approaches described above may increase the effectiveness of supervision, the limitations of a dyad relationship still stand. Within a developmental network perspective, multiple supportive relationships, rather than a single developmentally-focused connection, ultimately influence practitioner development (Higgins et al, 2007; Molloy, 2005). Thus, the works of Ward and House (1998), Young et al. (2011), and Lenz and Smith (2010) remain limited and differentiated from my study by their focus on a single relationship. In addition, these proposed models of supervision must be accepted and implemented by clinical supervisors in order to benefit the development of beginning counselors. By contrast, the developmental network perspective of my study may potentially empower beginning counselors to understand and access developmental support from multiple sources without depending upon supervisors to adapt a particular supervision model. In the following section, I discuss developmental networks as a theory across career fields and its specific application to the counseling profession.

Developmental Networks

Higgins and Kram (2001) presented the concept of developmental networks, applying concepts from social network theory to Kram's (1985) theoretical framework of mentoring and relationship constellation construct. Since the conception of this theory, several researchers have written about and studied the nature and function of developmental networks (Chandler & Kram, 2005; de Janasz, Sullivan, Whiting, & Biech, 2003; Halvorson et al., 2015; Kram & Higgins, 2009; Murphy & Kram, 2010; Terjesen & Sullivan, 2011). While the accumulated work offers new insights and increased complexities on the subject, this is still a young field of study with much to be examined (Dobrow et al., 2012; Murphy & Kram, 2010). In this section, I explore several existing works regarding developmental networks to demonstrate the current state of and gaps within the literature base. Specifically, I examine three conceptual pieces, two literature reviews, and five empirical studies.

Conceptual Articles on Developmental Networks

The three conceptual articles I discuss here demonstrate the conception and elaboration of developmental network theory. The first article is a seminal work in which Higgins and Kram (2001) initially presented the developmental network construct. Chandler and Kram (2005) explored the role developmental level of protégés and mentors plays in determining developmental network processes and outcomes. Kram and Higgins (2009) offered practical guidance to professionals seeking developmental support. These three works view developmental networks from multiple lenses and exhibit evolution of the construct through time. I examine the articles chronologically in the paragraphs below.

Higgins and Kram (2001) introduced the term *developmental network* in a foundational work on the subject. As I discussed in Chapter One, the authors conceptualized the

developmental network perspective through combining Kram's conceptualization of *career* and *psychosocial* mentoring functions with social network theory measures of *diversity* and *strength* in interpersonal connections. Diverse networks consist of developers who are from multiple sources or life-domains and provide information that is not redundant. Strong ties are emotionally intimate, mutually beneficial, and in frequent contact. Higgins and Kram discussed the potential use of these two dimensions for creating theoretical structures and engaging in future research. The authors proposed a four-category typology, hypothesized environmental and individual antecedent factors for developmental networks, and discussed potential implications of networks for protégé careers. Higgins and Kram closed by offering practical guidelines for researchers to explore the developmental network perspective. These included using interview questions that encourage study participants to discuss multiple persons who provide developmental support (rather than simply asking them to describe their "mentor") and framing measures, surveys, and interview questions along the structures of network diversity and strength. These concepts serve as a theoretical anchor for my study.

Chandler and Kram (2005) explored the role of developmental level on developmental networks, applying concepts from Kegan's (1994) developmental stage theory to the developmental network perspective. The authors asserted that the developmental stages of both protégés and developers are important considerations. Chandler and Kram theorized implications of protégé developmental level on developmental network formation and relationship outcomes. They also explored the potential effects of mentor developmental level on relationships, suggesting that developers at different stages will likely offer different types of support. The application of adult developmental theory to developmental networks has important implications for individuals seeking support as well as organizations seeking to create a growth-oriented

environment. Chandler and Kram's propositions describe protégé and mentor traits that make for optimal matches, thus offering individuals and organizations helpful guidance in their developmental pursuits.

Kram and Higgins (2009) also offered practical guidance regarding the fostering and formation of developmental networks. Based on their research and experience, the authors urged protégés to be intentional as they form their networks and provided specific steps for creating an effective developmental network. Kram and Higgins encouraged individuals to first assess themselves, recognizing their needs, priorities, career aspirations, and life goals. Second, they recommended assessing one's current and future career context to determine the skills, qualities, and relationships necessary to succeed in one's career field or the field one hopes to enter. The third step involves finding and building connections with a network of people with whom they may have mutually beneficial relationships that help them meet career goals. Fourth, the authors encouraged professionals to continually reassess their developmental networks throughout the career path. Career goals, life circumstances, and developmental needs change over time. Thus, it is important for protégés to monitor needs and update their developmental networks on an ongoing basis. Kram and Higgins closed by emphasizing that creating healthy developmental networks serves a purpose greater than individual support because it promotes environments of growth and cohesion within organizations and professions.

The three conceptual articles examined here demonstrate part of the evolution of developmental network research. Since Higgins and Kram (2001) introduced the construct, researchers have focused on understanding its antecedents and effects (e.g., Chandler & Kram, 2005) and promoting optimal implementation among real-world professionals (e.g., Kram & Higgins, 2009). Although these works added complexity and nuance to the developmental network

literature, they are primarily focused on business and corporate settings. There remains a gap in the literature regarding developmental network theory in healthcare-related settings and an absence of literature focusing on developmental networks in counseling. These are significant limitations in the existing literature that I addressed in the present study. In the following section, I further display the state of developmental network research by examining two major literature reviews.

Literature Reviews on Developmental Networks

Molloy (2005) reviewed conceptual and empirical works regarding developmental networks between 1985 (when Kram first proposed the construct of relationship constellations) and publication in 2005. The author discussed the purposes driving the conception of developmental network theory, examined research validating network perspectives as more informative than the traditional dyadic mentor perspective, and asserted that this construct is relevant in the real-world career context. In so doing, Molloy's review demonstrated that the developmental network construct is a substantial and meaningful contribution to mentoring research.

Molloy (2005) established three central purposes for the shift to the developmental network perspective within career contexts and research: 1) The transient nature of the contemporary job market increases the likelihood that individuals will acquire multiple supportive relationships as they change organizations and careers; 2) Internet technology increases accessibility of work-based interpersonal connections inside and outside of individuals' places of work; and 3) As the workforce is becoming more diverse, minority employees seek developmental relationships for guidance through unique challenges. The author noted that, as

employees' needs change and become more complex, they benefit from a diverse pool of developmental relationships.

Based on research trends and practices, Molloy (2005) clarified developmental network relationships as those that "the protégé names as having had a positive influence on the protégé's career development (during a specified period of time, often the previous year)" (p. 538). This statement is important in establishing the boundaries of developmental network research and informed the research methods for my study. Molloy concluded that there is a significant need for developmental network research to continue in the future, noting that the subject has potential for major contributions to mentoring research literature as a whole. The author further suggested that future research should include network members both inside and outside of the protégé's place of work, a path I intend to follow in the present study.

Dobrow et al. (2012) conducted a far-reaching literature review of the research on developmental networks. The authors differentiated the construct of developmental networks from similar concepts in the literature, categorized the existing developmental network research into four "streams" (p. 4), and proposed an agenda for future studies on the subject. The four streams of developmental network research are as follows: 1) "Antecedents of developmental network structure and content" (i.e., protégé and context qualities that shape relationship formation and function); 2) "Consequences of developmental network structure" (i.e., the effects of the nature of relationships within the developmental network); 3) Consequences of developmental network content (i.e., the effects of the type of support provided in the developmental network); and 4) "Mediators and moderators of the relationships between developmental networks and their antecedents and consequences" (i.e., additional factors shaping the formation and nature of developmental network relationships) (p. 11). The authors

placed existing articles in one or more of the above categories, examined individual and collective highlights and implications, and recommended directions for future research within each category.

Based on their assessment of the existing developmental network literature, Dobrow et al. (2012) encouraged future researchers to approach the construct from a "mutuality perspective" that included conceptualization of developmental networks from all viewpoints (p. 3). Most notably, the authors emphasized that the viewpoint of the developer (i.e., the mentoring figures within an individual's developmental network) is missing from current research on the subject and should be included in future studies.

In all, Molloy (2005) and Dobrow et al. (2012) used literature review to solidify the role of developmental networks within mentoring and career studies and broadly conceptualize the current state of developmental network research. They also offered important guidance as I seek to identify current needs within the literature and address these needs most directly. In the following section, I continue my review of the developmental network literature by examining five empirical studies.

Empirical Studies on Developmental Networks

The majority of research on developmental networks is based in quantitative data and analysis (de Janasz et al., 2003; Halvorson et al., 2015; Higgins & Thomas, 2001), leaving a qualitative gap in the literature on this subject. Despite this disparity in research methods, I provide a balanced review consisting of two quantitative studies, two qualitative studies, and one mixed methods study. This balanced approach enabled me to set precedence for my research methods and discuss empirically constructed ideas on which I built my study of developmental networks. I begin by examining two studies that established the legitimacy of developmental

networks within the mentoring and career literature, including one that was conducted prior to Higgins and Kram's (2001) publication of the developmental network model.

Higgins and Thomas (2001) completed a quantitative longitudinal study comparing career outcomes of single primary developmental relationships aligned with the traditional mentoring perspective and constellations comprised of multiple developmental mentoring relationships. The authors studied careers of 110 lawyers in prestigious New York firms over the course of a decade with attention to four career outcomes: "work satisfaction," "intentions to remain with one's firm in the short run," "organizational retention," and "promotion to partner in the long run" (p. 229). The researchers concluded that relationship constellations had a more far-reaching and long-lasting impact on career outcomes than single primary developmental relationships.

de Janasz et al. (2003) engaged in unstructured, qualitative interviews with 15 high-level executives in multiple professional fields, discussing their mentoring networks. The researchers used a content analysis approach to establish themes from the interview data and suggestions for creating an effective developmental network. The interviewers engaged participants with the following question: "Can you tell me a bit about a person who made a difference to you in terms of your career with [company name]?" (p. 88). The researchers noted that every participant discussed multiple important developmental figures, rather than a single figure as may be assumed in traditional dyadic mentor perspectives. Participants discussed the importance of connecting with multiple mentors with diverse backgrounds and perspectives, assessing and developing oneself to suit network relationships, and remaining flexible and open to changing network structure and dynamics. The results of this study reaffirmed the relevance of the developmental network perspective and closely aligned with many conceptual arguments by

Chandler and Kram (2005), Higgins and Kram (2001), and Kram and Higgins (2009). The following two studies focused on impact of relationships and experiences inside and outside of employees' professional organizations.

Murphy and Kram (2010) utilized a mixed-methods approach to study the role of developmental relationships both within and outside of the workplace. The researchers surveyed an initial sample of 254 professionals and conducted follow-up interviews with 37 of these individuals. Participants were full-time workers and part-time students in an MBA program at a large university. Results indicated that developmentally supportive relationships at work and away from work provided participants with significant and distinct benefits. At-work relationships were more likely to serve career functions (e.g., pay raises, increase skills, and career satisfaction) while non-work relationships more often served psychosocial functions (e.g., increasing life satisfaction). Murphy and Kram also noted that participants described non-work relationships as more stable and ultimately holding more significance in the long run. This study demonstrated the potential value of examining differing roles of developmental relationships from multiple life domains.

Terjesen and Sullivan (2011) studied mentoring relationships inside and outside of professional organizations as employees left their jobs to begin entrepreneurial pursuits. The researchers engaged in structured, qualitative interviews with 24 finance-related entrepreneurs in the United Kingdom. Their findings exhibited unique challenges and experiences of entrepreneurship. The researchers noted that participants had a few mentoring relationships carry over from old jobs, but most mentoring relationships came from past educational connections, other entrepreneurs in the community, and non-work social connections. Participants emphasized that mentoring relationships are important in the process of establishing new businesses and

acknowledged that it is difficult to find mentors without the built-in structure of larger organizations. Based on their findings, the researchers advised entrepreneurs to be intentional in their efforts to find mentoring connections, for example by attending community networking or professional development events. Terjesen and Sullivan provided several examples of interview questions used in the study. Because few qualitative interview studies exist within the multiple mentoring literature, these question examples served as an important resource for the formation of my study procedures.

The final empirical article I review is a large quantitative study conducted within health services, the only study I discovered within this field. Halvorson et al. (2015) examined the complex dynamics and inner workings (e.g., structure, communication patterns) of developmental networks among health services researchers. The researchers surveyed current and former protégé members of a successful mentoring program within the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs, receiving survey results from a total of 133 participants. Halvorson et al. noted several significant discoveries regarding specific structural patterns of participants' developmental networks. Most participants described their networks as consisting of a single primary mentor and multiple secondary mentors. Compared to secondary mentors, primary mentors tended to reside and work closer to protégés, allowing for informal, spontaneous interactions. Mentoring relationships involved frequent in-person and electronic-based communication "on both a scheduled and impromptu basis" (p. 828). The researchers also pointed out that those who participated in the mentoring program in more recent years averaged a higher number of mentors than previous protégés, indicating movement toward a developmental network model. Results from this study reaffirm the validity of the developmental network conceptualization and offer demonstrate how developmental networks may actually

work in day-to-day life. This provides concrete structure from which I can build impressions, frame questions, and intentionally interact with clients in the present study.

The empirical studies I selected for review demonstrate prominent foci, methods, and findings regarding developmental networks. The reviewed articles build on relevant conceptual literature by establishing the legitimacy of the developmental network perspective (de Janasz et al., 2003; Higgins & Thomas, 2001); verifying the significance of network relationships both inside and outside of the workplace (Murphy & Kram, 2010; Terjesen & Sullivan, 2011); expanding developmental network theory to the human services field; and introducing observed structural network patterns (Halvorson et al., 2015). The qualitative studies I reviewed also serve as foundational guidance in my design of the present qualitative study. The current scarcity of qualitative studies in the existing developmental network literature, along with the absence of research focusing on developmental networks in the counseling field, present significant gaps which I addressed in the present study. In the following section, I transition to a discussion of mentorship literature within the counseling field while integrating a developmental network perspective as constructed above.

Mentoring in Counseling

As mentioned in the previous section, I did not discover any published articles, conceptual or empirical, that applied developmental network theory to the counseling profession. In order to make this application for the present study, I examined literature focusing on mentorship within counseling. I selected articles concentrating on mentorship of individuals training and practicing in clinical settings (i.e., excluding works focusing primarily on research and academic practice). I identified six such articles for review: three conceptual and three empirical. I begin with the conceptual works.

Conceptual Articles on Mentoring in Counseling

Woodyard (2000) described the role of mentoring in counselor development. The author emphasized the role of mentorship support during professional transition periods. Further, she noted the counselors' career involves many difficult transitional experiences, particularly the early challenges of client service in which professionals may experience uncomfortable and anxiety-filled sessions, countertransference, and awareness of biases. Woodyard observed that, after completing graduate school, beginning counselors often struggle to find the supportive professional relationships that could help them grow through these challenges. She encouraged readers to advance the research and practice of mentoring relationships for beginning counselors.

Tentoni (1995) and Johnson (2007) wrote conceptual articles describing implementation of mentorship practices into supervision and training relationships. Tentoni (1995) explored implementation of mentorship into counselor training programs, briefly reviewing literature on mentoring support in counseling and describing mentoring practices in place within the author's graduate counseling program. The author applied an existing mentorship model to counselor training and proposed methods of intentionally modeling for trainees, offering career and psychosocial support, and connecting them to members of the counseling field.

Presenting a perspective from professional psychology, Johnson (2007) reported widespread concurrent recognition of the importance of intentionally training clinical supervisors and promoting mentorship within educational and clinical settings. The author implored readers to consider how these needs converge with the construct of mentorship-infused supervision. More specifically, Johnson proposed a continuum model of supervision between "transactional" (i.e., hierarchical, didactic, skill acquisition focused) and "transformational" (i.e., collaborative, mentoring, development of personal and professional identity focused) supervisory roles (p.

263). Johnson asserted that supervisors should locate supervision on the continuum as appropriate for the needs of individual supervisees. As supervisees develop, supervision should move from a transactional approach toward a more transformational relationship. The author provided several principles for applying his proposed model, including encouragement for supervisors to embrace a developmental network perspective. Johnson explained that trainees find developmental support from multiple settings (e.g., faculty, site supervisors, clinical supervisors, personal relationships, etc.), and that supervisors can most effectively and realistically conceptualize their support as a piece of a larger puzzle.

Empirical Works on Mentoring in Counseling

Lee and del Carmen Montiel (2011) researched mentorship engagement and work satisfaction in a study of 56 professionals at a large mental health agency. The researchers utilized two online survey questionnaires to assess relationships between engagement in mentor relationships and occupational satisfaction in supervisors and practitioners. They found that participants who perceived their supervisory relationships to include mentoring qualities had higher job satisfaction. In particular, results indicated that the mentoring roles of "assigning challenging tasks, sponsoring, and demonstrating trust" had positive effects on participant work satisfaction (p. 486). The authors urged readers to implement mentoring programs and conduct further research on mentorship in clinical settings. Although social workers formed the bulk of the sample, this research is relevant to the present study because it demonstrates the role of mentorship in clinical settings.

Terry, Gordon, Steadman-Wood, and Karel (2016) implemented and surveyed participants of a peer mentorship intervention for mental health professionals from diverse disciplines who were working in Veterans Health Administration Home Based Primary Care

(VHA-HBPC) programs. The researchers discussed the important role of mentoring relationships, noting that the VHA-HBPC setting requires unique skills and knowledge that most professionals do not receive in formal training. To bridge this gap, Terry et al. designed a peer mentoring program to facilitate acquisition of the needed competencies. The researchers advertised the program through a VA Central Office listserv, provided interested individuals with information on the nature of peer mentorship, and established mentor pairings based on expressed interests, needs, and geographic location. Mentor pairs were free to decide on the type and regularity of their contact. Survey data indicated that participants found mentoring relationships to be a helpful source of "acceptance, support, encouragement, and positive role modeling" and noted that the experience addressed the "sense of professional isolation" often involved in their work (p. 6). Although responses were largely positive, participants believed they would have benefited from more structure in mentoring relationships. Terry et al.'s (2016) approach was unique in examination of an active attempt to facilitate workplace mentoring support in mental health and serves as an exploratory model for future interventions and research.

Chung, Bemak, and Talleyrand (2007) noted a lack of multicultural focus within existing literature on mentorship in the counseling profession. The researchers engaged in semi-structured interviews with 20 counselors-in-training who identified as African American, Latina/o American, or Asian American. Interview questions prompted participants to consider ways in which their cultural identity shaped mentoring relationships with faculty members. Results indicated that ethnicity-specific preferences for mentoring existed among the participants, yet there was also considerable overlap in preferences from all three groups. For instance, participants from all ethnic backgrounds valued "trust" and "respect" within mentoring

relationships (p. 27). Further, a slight majority of participants stated that it was not important for them to have a mentor of the same ethnicity; rather, they valued having a "mentor who was culturally responsive and aware" (p. 27). Chung et al. concluded that cultural identity is an important consideration in mentoring relationships, offered specific recommendations for multicultural competence in mentoring, and encouraged further research on multicultural perspectives in mentoring.

Summary of Conceptual and Empirical Articles

In this section, I examined conceptual works that emphasized the salience of mentoring during transitional periods (Woodyard, 2000) and encouraged counseling supervisors and educators to integrate a mentoring approach in their work with counselor trainees (Johnson, 2007; Tentoni, 1995). I also presented three existing empirical works that examined the impact of mentor relationships in clinical counseling settings. Research findings indicated that mentoring relationships consisting of trust and mutual respect had positive effects on job satisfaction and interpersonal connection in the workplace (Chung et al., 2007; Lee & del Carmen Montiel, 2011; Terry et al., 2016). Further, Chung et al. found multicultural competence to be an important piece of mentoring practice within the counseling profession. Researchers in each study emphasized a need for additional future research on mentoring relationships in counseling. These articles served as the most direct connection between developmental networks and the counseling profession. They clearly confirmed the need for research on this subject and serve in a guiding role as a piece of the conceptual context for the present study.

Summary of the Literature Review

In this review of the literature regarding the developmental networks of beginning counselors, I discussed four major areas of research: 1) beginning counseling as a developmental

period; 2) clinical supervision of beginning counselors; 3) developmental networks; and 4) mentoring in the counseling field. The literature within these four categories pointed to a prominent need for research on developmental networks and beginning counselors, as separate constructs and as a combined research focus. In this section, I outline major contributions within each of the four areas as they pertain to the phenomenon of interest in the present study.

The first area I addressed is the developmental period of beginning counselors. I began by discussing principles of counselor development, which I derived from two widely accepted theoretical structures: Ronnestad and Skovholt's (2003) model of counselor development and Stoltenberg's (2008) IDM. Examining the two theories, I identified themes demonstrating the important roles of interpersonal relationships, continual increases of intra and interpersonal awareness, and shifts toward internal trust and the integrated self. These constructs support the essentiality of interpersonal connections and provide established principles for identifying and describing counselor development within my study.

As I narrowed my focus to the empirical and conceptual literature specifically examining beginning counselors, I identified two dominant themes of transition and connection. Following graduation, beginning counselors often face a difficult transitional period, including experiences of anxiety and self-doubt as they continually encounter new challenges (Duggal & Rao, 2016; Skovholt & Ronnestad, 2003; Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2011; Theriault et al., 2009). This transitional experience requires beginning counselors to draw on interpersonal supports, both within and outside of the workplace (Bischoff et al., 2002; Duggal & Rao, 2016; Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2003; Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2011; Theriault et al., 2009). Overall, research on the development of beginning counselors supports the importance of considering social

connections, provides context for describing the developmental process, and acknowledges the unique challenges facing beginning counselors.

The second major research area I addressed is clinical supervision of beginning counselors. I discussed the history and role of supervision in counseling, potential challenges and limitations of supervision practice, and existing attempts to address these challenges. Clinical supervision is a built-in relational resource for beginning counselors in every part of the United States (ACA, 2016). Supervisors provide multifaceted support to beginning counselors as they transition into practice (ACES, 2011; Borders et al., 2014). However, the impact of supervision relationships is limited by its inherent evaluative component and power differential (ACES, 2011; Pearson, 2000), ultimate focus on the wellbeing of the client (ACA, 2014; ACES, 2011; Pearson, 2000), and relational singularity (Higgins et al., 2007; Molloy, 2005). Supervisors can mitigate these challenges by working to develop a strong, trusting supervisory alliance (ACES, 2011; Pearson, 2000; Watkins, 2012). Further, Ward and House (1998), Young et al. (2011), and Lenz and Smith (2010) each proposed specific models by which supervisors can integrate psychosocial support and wellness concepts into supervision in effort to minimize the impact of the limitations described above. In the current study, I acknowledged supervisory relationships as a potentially significant piece of counselor developmental networks and considered clinical supervision research as I designed and implemented the research plan.

The third research area focuses on developmental networks. I systematically examined theoretical framework of developmental networks by narrowing from existing literature reviews to key conceptual and empirical works. While research on developmental networks has increased in recent years, researchers emphasized the need for continued research to better understand this phenomenon (Dobrow et al., 2012; Molloy, 2005; Murphy & Kram, 2010). In particular, Molloy

(2005) encouraged future researchers to consider developmental supports existing outside of the workplace, a consideration I plan to include in my study. The literature I reviewed in this section describes the historical growth and current state of research on developmental networks. I examined conceptual articles that introduce the theory (Higgins & Kram, 2001), dissect its potential structural compositions (Chandler & Kram, 2005), and provide advice regarding its application in real-world settings (Kram & Higgins, 2009). I discussed empirical articles that establish the salience of developmental networks as a theoretical proposition (de Janasz et al., 2003; Higgins & Thomas, 2001; Murphy & Kram, 2010; Terjesen & Sullivan, 2011) and lay important methodological groundwork for the present study (Halvorson et al., 2015; Murphy & Kram, 2010; Terjesen & Sullivan, 2011).

The fourth and final major research area involves mentoring within the counseling profession. Research in this category constitutes the clearest link between the theory (developmental networks) and population (beginning counselors) at the forefront of the present study. Researchers asserted that mentoring relationships can provide important benefits (such as satisfaction and personal connection) to the counseling work environment and stated the need for additional research in this area (Chung et al., 2007; Lee & del Carmen Montiel, 2011; Terry et al., 2016). This concludes my review of the literature regarding the developmental networks of beginning counselors. In the following chapter, I describe the method by which I plan to collect and analyze data for the present study.

Chapter Three: Methodology

In this chapter, I discuss methods and procedures I used to explore beginning counselors' experiences with developmental networks and their perceptions of interpersonal support in their professional development. I utilized a qualitative methodology, content analysis, to explore beginning counselors' developmental relationships and address the following research questions:

1. How do beginning counselors experience developmental networks?
    a. How do beginning counselors engage in (i.e., actively initiate and/or passively join) developmental network relationships?
    b. How do beginning counselors describe the makeup of their interpersonal supports?
2. How do beginning counselors perceive the role of interpersonal support in their growth as counselors?
    a. What developmental needs do beginning counselors meet or attempt to meet through interpersonal connections?
    b. How might professional-social environmental factors foster, deter, or shape growth for beginning counselors?

Qualitative research is useful for gathering a textured depiction of phenomena, making it a suitable approach for the present study, as I sought to capture rich descriptions of early counselor developmental networks through the voices and experiences of beginning counselors. (Creswell, 2013; Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Merriam, 1998). In the following sections, I further describe philosophical and practical foundations of my research approach, including the core qualities of qualitative research, an overview of the content analysis approach, and steps I took to instill

trustworthiness in the study. Following these foundational discussions, I describe specific actions I took in collecting and analyzing data.

Qualitative Research and Content Analysis

Qualitative Research

Qualitative approaches enable researchers to examine complex phenomena and use language to construct textured and meaningful descriptions and interpretations from collected data (Creswell, 2013; Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Merriam, 1998). Qualitative research is based in the philosophical assumption that "reality is constructed by individuals interacting with their social worlds" (Merriam, 1998, p. 6). Qualitative researchers seek to understand and portray phenomena and participant experiences from the perspectives of actual participants (i.e., the *emic*) rather than the perspective of the researcher (i.e., the *etic*), thus engaging and better understanding participants' socially constructed realities. Further, qualitative researchers use words and images (rather than numbers characteristic of quantitative research) to capture phenomena of interest and grant readers access to a deep, complex understanding of phenomena (Merriam, 1998).

Qualitative methodologies can provide important contributions to the existing developmental network literature for several reasons. First, qualitative research on developmental networks may lead to the development of key variables and terminology that can be further applied and investigated in quantitative studies (Dobrow, 2012). This would enable developmental network constructs and definitions to emerge from participant voices rather than standardized templates or researcher conceptualizations. Further, a nuanced description of the formation, inner-workings, and impact of developmental networks could be an important contribution in the ongoing progress of mentoring literature (Higgins & Thomas, 2001).

Qualitative methods may allow participants to speak in depth about their developmental network experiences, including to whom they go for particular needs, how they meet needs through interactions, and how relationships change over time.

Third, due to the absence of existing research on developmental networks of beginning counselors, the present study was exploratory in nature. A qualitative approach may provide important initial, foundational understanding regarding this theory and population (Creswell, 2013; Terjesen & Sullivan, 2011). Finally, a qualitative approach aligned with the goals of the present study. My aim was to gain understanding of beginning counselors' developmental networks, as experienced, perceived, and described by beginning counselors themselves. In other words, I intended to study participants' socially constructed realities in order to form a textured, complex description of the phenomenon of interest (i.e., developmental networks of beginning counselors). Qualitative research was the most natural and adequate fit to address these aims of the present study.

The Content Analysis Approach

In this section, I provide an overview and background regarding content analysis. I discuss the use of this approach in studying developmental networks and describe potential advantages and limitations. Later, in the Data Analysis section of this chapter, I further explicate specific processes I used to analyze data in the present study, including those pertaining to content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) and qualitative research more broadly (Creswell, 2013).

Qualitative researchers widely regard content analysis as a useful and effective method of research (Elo et al., 2014; Elo & Kyngas, 2008; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Merriam, 2009). Content analysis is commonly used among a variety of professional fields, with particular

prevalence among health-related professions, including medicine and the social sciences (Elo et al., 2014; Elo & Kyngas, 2008; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Although content analysis can involve both qualitative and quantitative strategies (Rossman & Rallis, 2012; Vaismoradi, Turunen, & Bondas, 2013), the present study implemented a qualitative approach to data collection and analysis.

As a research method, content analysis involves examining language communication to organize data into categories or themes. Hsieh and Shannon (2008) defined content analysis as "a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns" (p. 1278). In their own definition, Vaismoradi et al. (2013) further delineated content analysis as a "systematic coding and categorizing approach used for exploring large amounts of textual information unobtrusively to determine trends and patterns of words used, their frequency, their relationships, and the structures and discourses of communication" (p. 400). A central function of this research method is to interpret and condense large amounts of textual data into meaningful categories in a manner and quantity that is accessible and manageable for readers (Elo & Kyngas, 2008; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Rossman & Rallis, 2012; Vaismoradi et al., 2013). Content analysis researchers may interpret meaning in data by noting what is said, frequency at which certain things are communicated, and/or process in which communication takes place (e.g., pauses, non-verbal communication, changes in voice) (Elo & Kyngas, 2008; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Vaismoradi et al., 2013).

In the present study, I utilized an inductive qualitative content analysis approach. Inductive (or *conventional*) content analysis involves engaging participants and data in an exploratory fashion, deriving codes, categories, and themes from the data itself. This approach is

differentiated from a deductive (or *directed*) content analysis study in which codes and themes are pre-established from existing theories and/or data (Elo & Kyngas, 2008; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Vaismoradi et al., 2013). Because I focused the present study on describing the nature and processes of beginning counselors' developmental networks *as they perceive them* (rather than testing or expounding on an existing structure within either the counseling field or developmental network theory), an inductive approach was a good fit for this research.

Although I did not establish themes from previously existing theories and data, I did examine the results of this study in light of Ronnestad and Skovholt's (2003) theory of counselor development and Higgins and Kram's (2001) developmental network theory. I discuss the examination of findings with these two theories in the Discussion section of this dissertation. Hsieh and Shannon (2005) noted that in inductive content analysis studies, theories related to the subject of interest should be discussed at the conclusion of the study. In the following subsection, I discuss existing content analysis research focusing on developmental networks.

Content analysis and developmental networks. Multiple researchers have used content analysis to study developmental networks (e.g., de Janasz et al., 2003; Murphy & Kram, 2010; Terjesen & Sullivan, 2011). Researchers in these studies collected data through structured and unstructured interviews and used content analysis methods to analyze interview transcripts. de Janasz et al. (2003) executed and analyzed unstructured interviews with high-ranking executives from several different professional fields regarding their experiences with mentoring networks. Murphy and Kram (2010), central figures in the construction of developmental network theory, utilized semi-structured interviews and content analysis as a part of their mixed-methods study of working MBA students' developmental networks. Terjesen and Sullivan (2011) used a structured

interviewing and content analysis approach to study the mentoring networks of workers as they transition from corporate employment to entrepreneurship.

The content analysis method allowed researchers the flexibility and depth to gather rich data directly from participants regarding the formation and composition of their developmental networks and present this data in a descriptive and accessible manner, all of which parallel the central purpose and questions of the present study. These researchers' utilization of content analysis in studying developmental networks demonstrates that this research method is a useful fit for developmental networks and laid important groundwork for my study. In the next subsection, I discuss the strengths and limitations of the content analysis method.

Advantages and limitations of content analysis. As a qualitative research approach, content analysis consists of both advantages and limitations. Elo and Kyngas (2008) explained that one major strength of content analysis is it allows researchers to examine and derive meaningful findings from large amounts of data. Further, Cavanagh (1997) noted that content analysis is a flexible approach, enabling researchers to match appropriate methods and strategies to observe and discuss complex data. Vaismoradi et al. (2013) added that "transparent structures" and clear procedural stages exist to guide content analysis researchers through a fundamentally sound research process (p. 403). The existence of both flexibility and structure add procedural balance to the list of strengths in content analysis.

Elo and Kyngas (2008) stated that a primary disadvantage of content analysis research is that the often large amounts of data involved may be overwhelming to the researcher. In addition, although Vaismoradi et al. (2013) asserted that content analysis strategies are straightforward and clearly defined, Elo and Kyngas countered with the position that content analysis lacks "simple guidelines," adding that "results depend on the skills, insights, analytic

abilities, and style of the investigator" (p. 113). The authors stated that ambiguity in content analysis methodology can paralyze researchers and add difficulty to the articulation of research processes in the final report. It is important to note that ambiguity and lack of clarity and precision in procedures and reporting is a challenge inherent to most forms of qualitative research (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 1998).

Elo and Kyngas (2008) stated that another potential disadvantage in content analysis is the common perception that the method is too simplistic. Vaismoradi et al. (2013) affirmed this point, claiming that a "stereotype exists among qualitative researchers" that content analysis is among the "easiest (qualitative) research approaches" (p. 403). Vaismoradi et al. confronted this notion, asserting that content analysis, while a fundamental approach, can produce meaningful, high quality findings when researchers are reflexive and intentional.

Hsieh and Shannon (2005) discussed the advantages and limitations specific to inductive content analysis. The authors stated that this approach has the advantage of allowing researchers to collect participant perspectives without depending on a pre-established theoretical stance specific to the subject of inquiry. Conversely, Hsieh and Shannon (2005) noted that inductive content analysis may make it difficult for researchers to develop an adequate understanding of the context in which the phenomenon of interest is situated. However, the authors noted that steps can be taken to promote sufficient understanding and trustworthiness in inductive content analysis studies. I outline steps taken to promote trustworthiness in the study throughout the Participants, Data Collection, and Data Analysis sections and provide a more concentrated discussion in the Trustworthiness section toward the end of the chapter. Next, I describe the participants included in the present study.

Participants

After receiving IRB approval for the study, I began recruiting participants. Participants in the study were practicing counselors who had recently (i.e., within approximately two years) graduated with a master's degree in counseling. I continued collecting and analyzing data until I reached a point of saturation regarding the research questions. Qualitative researchers generally consider saturation, the point at which data provides no new information, to be a key indicator of completion in qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1998) and specifically in content analysis (Elo et al., 2014; Elo & Kyngas, 2008).

I recruited participants by using criterion sampling (also referred to as *purposive sampling*). Criterion sampling involves establishing a set of criteria and selecting participants who best meet the criteria. Criterion sampling is a well-established sampling method in qualitative research (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 1998) and is widely used within content analysis studies (Elo et al., 2014). This approach enables researchers to engage individuals who have lived the phenomenon of interest by setting criteria that specifies experience of the phenomenon. The criteria for selection in this study specified that participants must be practicing counselors within approximately two years after graduating from a CACREP-accredited master's degree in counseling program. This included all CACREP-accredited program specializations with the exception of school counseling. Further, criteria required participants to have practiced for a minimum average of 10 hours per week since graduating, without ceasing practice for a period greater than four consecutive months. As a part of these criterion-based methods, I utilized *snowball sampling* (Elo et al., 2014; Merriam, 1998). According to Merriam (1998), snowball sampling involves asking participants or other individuals who are well-positioned to be aware of relevant data sources to recommend additional people who may fit the sample criteria.

The study sample included 12 participants. Participant pseudonyms and corresponding demographic descriptors are displayed in Table 3.1. Nine participants identified as female and three identified as male. Regarding race and ethnicity, each of the 12 participants identified as White or Caucasian. Participant ages ranged as follows: one participant was between the ages of 20-24, five were 25-29, three were 30-34, one was 40-44, and two were 45-49. Eight participants lived and practiced in one state in the Southeastern US, three were in one state in the Northeastern US, and one was in a state in the Northwestern US.

Nine participants graduated with their counseling master's degree within one year prior to the interview and three graduated between one and two years prior to the interview. All 12 participants obtained a master's degree with a mental health counseling focus, with one participant holding a dual-track degree (i.e., mental health and school counseling). The participants represented seven separate master's degree in counseling programs (i.e., from seven different universities). Participant practice settings varied considerably. Six participants identified their practice setting as rural, two identified the setting as urban, two identified suburban, one in a mid-sized city, and one traveled to work in a range of different environments. Participant places of work included the following: Community mental health center, psychiatric hospital, private practice, addictions counseling (including outpatient clinic and Methadone/Suboxone clinic), and church setting. In the following section, I discuss the specific processes by which I recruited participants.

Data Collection Procedure

Introduction and Subjectivity

Merriam (1998) stated that the term *data collection*, though commonly accepted within both qualitative and quantitative research, may be misleading. Instead, Merriam argued that data

Table 3.1: Participant Demographics

Name (pseudonym)	Sex	Age Range	Region (US)	Practice Setting	Type of Work
Alex	Male	40-44	Southeast	Suburban	Private/Pastoral
Beth	Female	30-34	Southeast	Mid-sized City	Inpatient Hosp.
Carla	Female	25-29	Southeast	Rural	Community Mental Health
Dana	Female	45-49	Southeast	Rural	Private & Inpatient Hosp. (PRN)
Ellen	Female	25-29	Southeast	Rural	Community Mental Health
Francis	Female	20-24	Southeast	Urban	Community Mental Health
Greg	Male	30-34	Southeast	Suburban	Private/Pastoral
Hank	Male	30-34	Northeast	Rural	Community Mental Health
Irene	Female	25-29	Northeast	Irene	Addictions
Julie	Female	45-49	Northeast	Travels/Varies	Addictions
Kacie	Female	25-29	Northwest	Rural	Community Mental Health
Lily	Female	25-29	Southeast	Rural	Community Mental Health

is constructed and at least somewhat intentionally *selected* in a process driven by the researchers' purpose, priorities, theoretical orientation, and research approach. In the present study, these and countless other factors shaped the criteria for participant selection, the salience I assigned to particular data, and the meaning I made out of data. I based my subjective lens on the theoretical and empirical literature discussed in Chapter Two, the qualitative and content analysis principles described in this chapter, and the conscious and unconscious beliefs and experiences I hold as a researcher.

Although the term data collection may be imperfect, I continue to use it in the present study while considering the caveat discussed above. Further, throughout the research process I sought to maximize awareness and transparency of the important influences discussed above in the same manner that I took intentional measures to promote rigor in the study. In order to support both transparency and rigor, I consulted Creswell's (2013) circle of data collection practices. Creswell includes such practices as identifying participants, building rapport, recording and storing data, and managing practical and ethical concerns. This outline served as a guide for the data collection practices in the present study, which I describe in the paragraphs below.

Participant Contact and Facilitation

To recruit participants for the study, I sent an invitation email to representative contacts at counseling master's degree programs, mental health agencies, and regional professional associations. *Representative contacts* included graduate program directors, administrative assistants, university faculty members, clinical and administrative supervisors, and individuals in professional association leadership roles. I requested that representative contacts disperse the email invitation to individuals who may qualify and instruct those who are interested to contact

me directly with a statement of interest. I used broad email networks in an effort to recruit a diverse sample. I sent the invitation email to representatives from over 30 institutions (including at least 20 counseling master's degree programs) covering seven states in the Southeastern, Northeastern, and Northwestern regions of the United States. In order to access representatives' contact information, I utilized my dissertation committee members' networks, my own existing network connections, and online resources such as university websites and the CACREP website.

The email invitation provided a brief description of the study, contained the participant consent form, and provided my contact information for those interested in participating. In addition, the email outlined provisions for a $15 gift card incentive following participation in the interview. I responded by email to prospective participants who expressed interest. My email response included a brief screening questionnaire that ensured participants met established study criteria. The screening questions I used for initial email responses are included in Appendix A. I collected respondent names and contact information and screened respondents with initial demographic questions in order to begin forming the study sample. As participants cleared the screening protocol, I set up interview appointments with selected participants. I selected participants in the order of their expressions of interest and availability for participating in the interview.

For the interview location, I reserved a private office on the university campus where I am a student. I provided students with specific instructions for parking and I offered to pay for any parking costs. For participants who were unable or preferred not to come to the interview on campus, I provided the option of an online video conference interview via Zoom software system. A growing body of literature supports video conference interviewing as a means of data collection that produces similar results to face-to-face interviews (Deakin & Wakefield, 2014;

Tuttas, 2015). Six of the twelve participants I interviewed in this study used the video conference option.

Before each interview began, I asked participants to read and sign an informed consent document, in compliance with ACA ethical standards for counseling research as well as local IRB requirements (ACA, 2014). The informed consent form notified participants of the nature and limitations of confidentiality in the study and informed them of their right to stop the interview or rescind data and end their participation at any time. I emailed the informed consent form to participants who interviewed via video conference. These participants returned the form by either providing an e-signature or printing, signing, and scanning the document and submitting it to me via the University of Tennessee Vault secure carrier system. While communicating with participants before and/or after each interview, I asked them if they knew of other individuals who may be interested and meet qualifications for the study. This served as one means of snowball sampling.

Data Gathering & Storage

I engaged in semi-structured interviews with each participant. Interviews averaged approximately 60 minutes, with the longest being around 85 minutes and the shortest around 37 minutes. In order to capture audio recordings of each interview, I used electronic audio recorders that were not equipped to connect to the internet. For video conference interviews, I also recorded interviews using the built-in recording feature of the video conferencing computer program and saved the videos as password protected files. At the close of each interview, I assigned participants a pseudonym, which represented each participant in the stored transcript and written reports. The use of a pseudonym helped preserve participant confidentiality, an important component of ethical research practice in counseling (ACA, 2014).

Following each interview, I promptly stored the collected data on my password-protected personal laptop computer hard drive and on a backup USB drive. As an additional measure, I password-protected interview files and named files by pseudonyms to protect participant identity. I stored the backup USB drive in a locked box at my home. I deleted recordings from the audio recording devices.

Upon completing the interviews, I hired a professionally established, secure transcribing service (Rev.com) to provide verbatim interview transcriptions. Rev.com transcribers ensured that interview data would remain confidential as a part of their terms of service. In addition, I obtained a signed non-disclosure agreement from the transcription service. After receiving transcription documents from Rev.com, I checked the transcripts for accuracy by listening to each interview while reading through its corresponding transcript. I edited any errors in the transcripts and added notations for filler words, pauses, and other process elements of conversation. I stored transcription files in the same manner as audio files. I will destroy all hard copy notes and electronic files containing data after a period of three years. The Instrumentation section includes further discussion regarding the study's interview questions and protocol.

Instrumentation

Interviews

Data collection consisted of one primary method, semi-structured interviews. Rossman and Rallis (2012) stated that "in-depth interviewing is the hallmark of qualitative research" (p. 176). The authors noted that interview data is a crucial approach to accessing the perspectives of qualitative study participants, a key component of this study's purpose. Hsieh and Shannon (2005) wrote that *open-ended questions* or prompts are most effective when interviews are used for data gathering in inductive content analysis studies. The authors also noted that researchers

conducting inductive studies often probe participants to expound on initial statements, thus collecting data that most clearly, directly, and thoroughly represents participant perspectives. In the present study, I primarily used open-ended questions and prompts in the interview process. The semi-structured nature of the interviews allowed me the flexibility to adapt the interview to focus on salient participant experiences and perspectives. I utilized follow-up questions, prompts, and probing statements to facilitate this process. The use of lengthy interviews allowed time for depth of discussion regarding the phenomenon of interest.

Interviews began with a brief series of questions pertaining to participant demographics. After the demographic questionnaire, the interviews followed a pre-established, semi-structured interview protocol focused on the phenomenon of inquiry. Alongside my dissertation committee, I continued to check interview questions for trustworthiness and consistency with the research design until finalization prior to interviewing participants. I audio-recorded each interview and had the recordings transcribed for analysis. I describe the data analysis procedures in the following section.

Data Analysis

Creswell (2013) offered five fundamental steps to qualitative data analysis. Meanwhile, Hsieh and Shannon (2005) constructed a six-step data analysis approach to inductive content analysis. The two data analysis approaches are similar in basic structure, yet differ in their intentions and in the type of instruction they provide the reader. Creswell described the purpose and essential components of qualitative data analysis steps. On the other hand, Hsieh and Shannon discussed specific strategies that make up the inductive content analysis method. I based the analysis process in the present study on the guidelines of these two approaches. In the following paragraphs, I describe the data analysis procedures I followed in the present study. I

organize this description following Creswell's five steps, and complement these steps with the strategies of Hsieh and Shannon.

The first step in Creswell's (2013) process is to organize the research data. I divided the transcripts into single interviews. I labeled interviews with the pseudonym representing each participant and stored interviews in a password-protected computer program. The second step is reading the entire data set and "memoing"—writing short notes of initial impressions in the document margins (p. 183). Hsieh and Shannon (2005) also described this step, encouraging researchers to immerse themselves in the data by reading it multiple times in its entirety, "as one would read a novel" (p. 1279). I read through each interview transcript first with a holistic lens, briefly noting key phrases or ideas by highlighting and memoing in the document margins.

After reading the data as a whole and forming initial impressions, I engaged in Creswell's (2013) third step, coding. Hsieh and Shannon (2005) specified that coding involves a process of reduction, in which researchers first identify key words and phrases then group related codes into categories. This process is continued until data are condensed into a small, manageable number of broad clusters, or *themes*. In order to develop a thorough understanding of the data, I read each transcript carefully and repeatedly, coding each sentence in initial and revisionary rounds. Following Creswell's recommendation, I looked for data-driven evidence to form and apply each code. Hsieh and Shannon suggested that researchers using inductive content analysis may begin coding by forming initial codes from a subset of the data, then applying codes to the entire data set. I used this approach, as I first carefully read three interview transcripts, then organized participants' statements and expressions into categories. Categories included statements and expressions that were similar in meaning or subject. I collapsed these categories into initial codes and then applied these initial codes to all 12 interview transcripts, re-coding the initial three

transcripts to ensure consistency. As I proceeded through the transcripts, I integrated new statements and expressions by forming additional codes and editing existing codes to more fully represent the entire data set. As I added new codes, I revisited previously-coded transcripts to apply these codes to the data in its entirety. Once I had coded the entire data set, I clustered codes into themes and delineated individual codes using subcodes and specifiers.

Hsieh and Shannon (2005) suggested using a tree diagram to facilitate and conceptualize data-narrowing procedures. This is a visual diagram in which a wide base of specific codes gradually narrows to broader, more encompassing categories in a pyramid or *tree* shape. I utilized this technique to broadly conceptualize coding and categorizing procedures. Throughout the process of data analysis, I used multiple tools and strategies to organize and apply codes within the transcript documents. I utilized Dedoose (2018) software for several organizational procedures. After uploading transcription files into the Dedoose program, I constructed a coding tree, directly applied codes to transcripts, and continually edited names and structures of codes and themes during the coding process.

Following coding procedures, Creswell's (2013) fourth step in data analysis is interpreting the data. Interpretation involves deriving and articulating meaning from the data as it applies to a larger context. Creswell explained that this process includes and extends beyond the coding procedures. In addition to coding, I incorporated the following interpretation strategies provided by Hsieh and Shannon (2005): a) provided explicit definitions for codes and themes; b) provided specific examples of codes and themes directly from the data in the Results section of the report; and c) examined findings in light of relevant theories in the Discussion section of the report. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, I examined findings using a lens that incorporates Ronnestad and Skovholt's (2003) counselor development theory and Higgins and Kram's (2001)

developmental network theory. As an additional step in interpretation, I met with a peer debriefer from outside of the study. This individual examined my initial codes, offered feedback regarding my categorization decisions, and provided perspective and ideas that expanded the breadth of my awareness and decision-making processes within the study.

The final step of Creswell's (2013) data analysis approach involves constructing data representations that communicate the research interpretation in a manner which outside readers can access and understand. I organized findings and interpretations into a distinct set of themes and provided definitions and examples explaining and justifying the adoption of these themes. Further, I provide the tree diagram I used in the coding process (described above) as a part of the written research report. Once I collected and analyzed the data, I also constructed verbal expressions and visual representations, including coding tree diagrams and an additional graphic, to best represent final findings and interpretation. I provide these visuals in the Results section of this dissertation.

As a member check, I sent a summary of my analysis to participants in order to provide them with an opportunity for clarification, correction, and final approval. Three participants responded with statements of support for my findings (i.e., expressed that findings accurately describe their experiences and perspectives). No participants suggested changing findings. Throughout this process, I consulted with my dissertation chair to check the efficacy of my interpretations and representations. In the following section, I discuss the subjective perspective I bring as I approach the study in my role of primary researcher.

Researcher Interest and Positionality

My interest in developmental networks of beginning counselors stems from my experiences and training in counseling and counselor education. In both professional and

personal domains, I have experienced the anxiety of transitions and trials as well as the thrill of successes and growth. In my own experiences and in my observation of others, I have noted the impact of social relationships on the journey of development. I have taken particular interest in the transition between graduate school and the counseling workforce, as I have noticed unique challenges in this period along with a lack of existing attention on this professional developmental stage in the counseling literature. I hope to understand the social context of this transition on a deeper level, establish a personally meaningful focus area for my own future research agenda, and begin to lay the foundations for a new branch of research in the counselor development literature.

Looking back on my journey thus far, I recall the mix of excitement and terror I felt beginning my first counseling job. I can still remember the drowning sensation as I looked clients in the eyes—the weight of their hurt balanced between us, and feared I had no idea what I was doing. I can also remember plopping on the couch in my colleague's office and spilling my anxieties. My colleague's availability and compassion addressed an urgent need for me, as administrative support and community resources were limited in this rural small town. Whether these impromptu meetings lasted an hour or only five minutes, they reminded me that I had been trained, that my presence with clients was valuable, and that I was not alone.

This type of relationship has existed in many forms over the past few years as my own network has evolved. In those early days I cried out to the closest counseling peers in effort to stay afloat. As I began my doctoral work, I leaned on and prized the support and guidance of faculty members, clinical supervisors, and colleagues in both academic and clinical settings. I have trusted many with my career goals as well as my fears and insecurities.

Recognizing the immense value I place on these relationships was crucial as I began this study. This subject invokes gratitude for the times I felt most supported and frustration for the moments I felt alone and overwhelmed. My own powerful feelings regarding early counselor development had the potential to create or hide biases and assumptions about the experience of others during the course of this study. For example, ignoring these thoughts and emotions may have led me to assume participants felt a certain level of isolation and anxiety as they began counseling practice. Alternatively, I might have vicariously looked within others for the early developmental support that I did not receive. I might also have carried assumptions about the nature of effective mentoring and supportive relationships. In reflecting on my own experiences, I realized that I particularly value informal mentoring relationships where I can "let loose" and openly discuss deep insecurities and concerns. I may have been tempted to assume this type of supportive relationship is also most salient for participants.

While the personal connection I feel with this subject served as a meaningful motivator as I engaged in the present study, it was vital that I deeply considered and reflected upon the aforementioned emotions and biases in order to competently carry out the study. Throughout the study, I continually reflected on my beliefs and experiences regarding the developmental networks of beginning counselors. I did this using multiple strategies that increased my self-awareness and/or communicated that awareness to the consumers of the study's reports. In the following section, I discuss these and other strategies I used to promote trustworthiness in the study.

Trustworthiness

Researchers and scholars commonly evaluate and discuss the rigor of content analysis studies (and qualitative studies more broadly) in terms of its *trustworthiness* (Elo & Kyngas,

2008; Elo et al., 2014). Lincoln and Guba (1985) explained that establishing a study's trustworthiness demonstrates that the study is "worth paying attention to" (p. 290). Merriam (1998) asserted that trustworthiness houses the concepts of validity and reliability as they exist within qualitative research. That is, validity and reliability take a distinct form within qualitative research in which, as Merriam noted, they constitute careful and thorough ethical practice. Due to the essential role of trustworthiness in establishing meaningful and ethical research, I took at least six intentional steps to promote trustworthiness within the present study.

First, I bracketed my own subjectivity and biases throughout the study (Creswell, 2013). I accomplished this by using three strategies: journaling, consultation, and a role reversal interview. I kept a weekly research journal, in which I reflected on my thoughts and emotions around the study, from the time I disseminated initial invitations until I completed the Results and Discussion sections of the study report. Vaismoradi et al. (2013) stated that research journals are a useful way to promote rigor within content analysis studies. In journal entries, I reflected on my cognitive and emotional experiences of the research process. I processed experiences of frustration, challenge, excitement, and success as I moved through various phases of the study. The journal facilitated an awareness of assumptions and biases as I carried out research practices. For instance, journaling helped me identify feelings of frustration when reading specific transcripts, process the source and meaning of these emotions, and take a more objective perspective in my analysis.

For a subsequent method of bracketing, I consulted my dissertation committee chair on at least a bi-weekly basis to diversify perspectives and continually increase awareness of my assumptions and biases. The consultation process also included periodic support from other committee members (e.g., reading and critiquing research plan, participating in proposal defense,

answering specific questions). Finally, I engaged in a role-reversal interview, wherein I took the role of interviewee and my dissertation chair facilitated an interview based on the initial interview guide I create for the study. The role-reversal interview promoted awareness of my assumptions and biases as I identified significant experiences and beliefs that have shaped my professional development and worldview. The role-reversal interview also enabled my dissertation committee chair and I to evaluate the salience of interview questions. Following the interview, I reflected on the experience of hearing and answering the interview questions, which allowed me to more effectively consider how participants may experience and perceive the interview. These three strategies comprised a multifaceted bracketing approach.

In addition to bracketing, I engaged in a process of peer debriefing (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Merriam, 1998). I regularly met with my dissertation chair to discuss decisions and findings throughout data collection and analysis procedures. When meeting with my dissertation chair, I specifically solicited feedback regarding my process of creating and defining codes, categories, and broad themes from the raw data. I also brought in a colleague from outside of the study to examine my initial codes and subsequent process of analysis and categorization. I provided this outside peer debriefer with initial codes, definitions, and broader categories; allowed the individual time to read and consider my procedures and generate feedback; met for one direct consultation to discuss the feedback; and continued to receive feedback via email correspondence following the direct consultation. I also processed my cognitive and emotional experiences of the research process with my dissertation committee chair and the peer debriefer. For example, I discussed my experiences of frustration reading transcripts (which I identified while journaling) and continued to evaluate and work through these experiences.

Third, I engaged in steps to triangulate the data (Creswell, 2013; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Merriam, 1995; Merriam, 1998). I gathered data from multiple participants with diverse demographics and stages of professional development, which offered differing perspectives of the phenomenon of interest. I also engaged in peer debriefing (described above) and member checking (described below) procedures, both of which triangulated data analysis and interpretation.

Fourth, I provided rich, thick descriptions of the data (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 1998). I went beyond providing titles of categories and themes, as I described participant messages and expressions, provided specific quotes to demonstrate the origins of categories, and openly discussed my methods and thinking through the analysis process. Describing data in specific and detailed terms helped me present participant voices in a meaningful and accurate manner. Fifth, I formed an audit trail throughout the research process (Merriam, 1998). I provided careful documentation of data collection and data analysis procedures, including how I constructed categories and made analytical decisions along the way. I documented these procedures in my research journal and through analytic memos.

Sixth, after I analyzed the data and constructed categories and themes, I engaged in member checking (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 1995). I sent my initial analyses to participants and prompted them to 1) identify whether my interpretations accurately describe their expressed perspective and 2) suggest edits, additions, or subtractions that clarify their perspective. As I discussed previously, three participants responded with support for my findings and no participants suggested changing findings.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I discussed the research questions and method of the present study. I described the nature and present application of both qualitative research and, more specifically, the inductive content analysis approach. Then, I described the importance of trustworthiness and the measures I took to promote trustworthiness in this research. Finally, I provided the specific steps I followed to conduct the study, including the procedures of data collection and analysis.

Chapter Four: Findings

Chapter Introduction

In this chapter, I report the findings from my study of beginning counselors' developmental networks and interpersonal supports. I used an inductive content analysis approach to collect and analyze interviews with 12 beginning counselors. Data analysis yielded a number of individual codes and subcodes that aggregated into five major themes: *Context of Personal-Professional Identity; Adjustment/Transition; Growth Orientation; Network Organization; and Connective Tissue*. I report the research findings by discussing these themes. In addition, I provide codes and corresponding interview excerpts that explain and support each theme. In the following paragraphs, I provide an overview of the five major themes followed by a detailed description of each theme. I also provide a visual representation, Table 4.1, that displays network members whom participants identified as particularly impactful regarding their development. Table 4.1 serves as a reference point which readers may use to engage in a more thorough consideration and understanding of participant responses and study findings. Throughout the description of themes, I use codes to form the bolded subheadings and denote subcodes in italics and subcode specifiers in quotation marks. At the beginning of each theme, I provide a coding tree figure that visually displays the organization of analysis.

Overview of Themes

For the purpose of this chapter, I present the major themes in an order that clearly demonstrates the meaning of each theme and the ways in which the themes relate to one another. I begin with *Context of Personal-Professional Identity*, which includes the environment, circumstances, and events surrounding participants as they integrated personal and professional roles and identities. I placed this theme first as it describes the broadest backdrop for participant

Table 4.1: Key Network Members

Name	Key Network Members			
Alex	Brother-in-law	Clinical supervisor	Church member (helping field)	
Beth	Clinical team leader (Psychiatrist)	Clinical supervisor		
Carla	Administrative supervisor	Former internship supervisor	Colleague (first met in internship)	
Dana	Spouse	Clinical supervisor		
Ellen	Two peers from graduate program	Clinical supervisor	Administrative supervisor	Fiancé
Francis	Long-time friend	Clinical supervisor	Coworkers (as collective)	
Greg	Former internship supervisor	Clinical supervisor	Spouse (helping field)	
Hank	Clinical supervisor	Therapist		
Irene	Friend (recently died, in helping field)	Clinical supervisor	Administrative supervisor	
Julie	Clinical supervisor	Former therapist (now colleague)	Former professor	
Kacie	Clinical supervisor	Peer from graduate program	Therapist	Former supervisor (from graduate program)
Lily	Immediate family member	Clinical supervisor	Administrative supervisor	

experience and, thus, the remaining themes. Second, *Adjustment/Transition* describes how participants bridged the gap from school to practice, including the training and connections they carried into the field and the challenges they experienced in their new role. *Growth Orientation* discusses the factors that facilitated participants' professional growth and self-directed efforts to grow through professional experiences. *Network Organization* comprises the shape and structure of participant networks, including types of relational boundaries and external factors that shape network relationships. Finally, *Connective Tissue* represents factors, including qualities and processes, which attracted and/or held participants to network members. At the beginning of each theme's section, I provide a figure that visually portrays the coding tree for that theme. In the next section, I describe the first theme, *Context of Personal-Professional Identity*, in further detail.

Theme 1: Context of Personal-Professional Identity

The first theme describes multiple contexts of participants' lives and the blending of their identities and roles within these contexts. Participants discussed circumstances, events, and relationships within various domains of life that they considered impactful for their professional development and experience. These descriptions involved both distinguishing contextual realms (e.g., personal, geo-cultural, career) and demonstrating how these domains integrate into a core identity. Figure 4.1 displays the structure of codes and subcodes within this theme. First, I discuss participants' personal life context.

Life context. All participants discussed multiple domains of life that influenced their identity as professionals. I classified the first domain with the subcode *personal life context*, which includes circumstances, experiences, and relationships outside of the professional realm that participants noted as impactful within the professional realm. These personal components

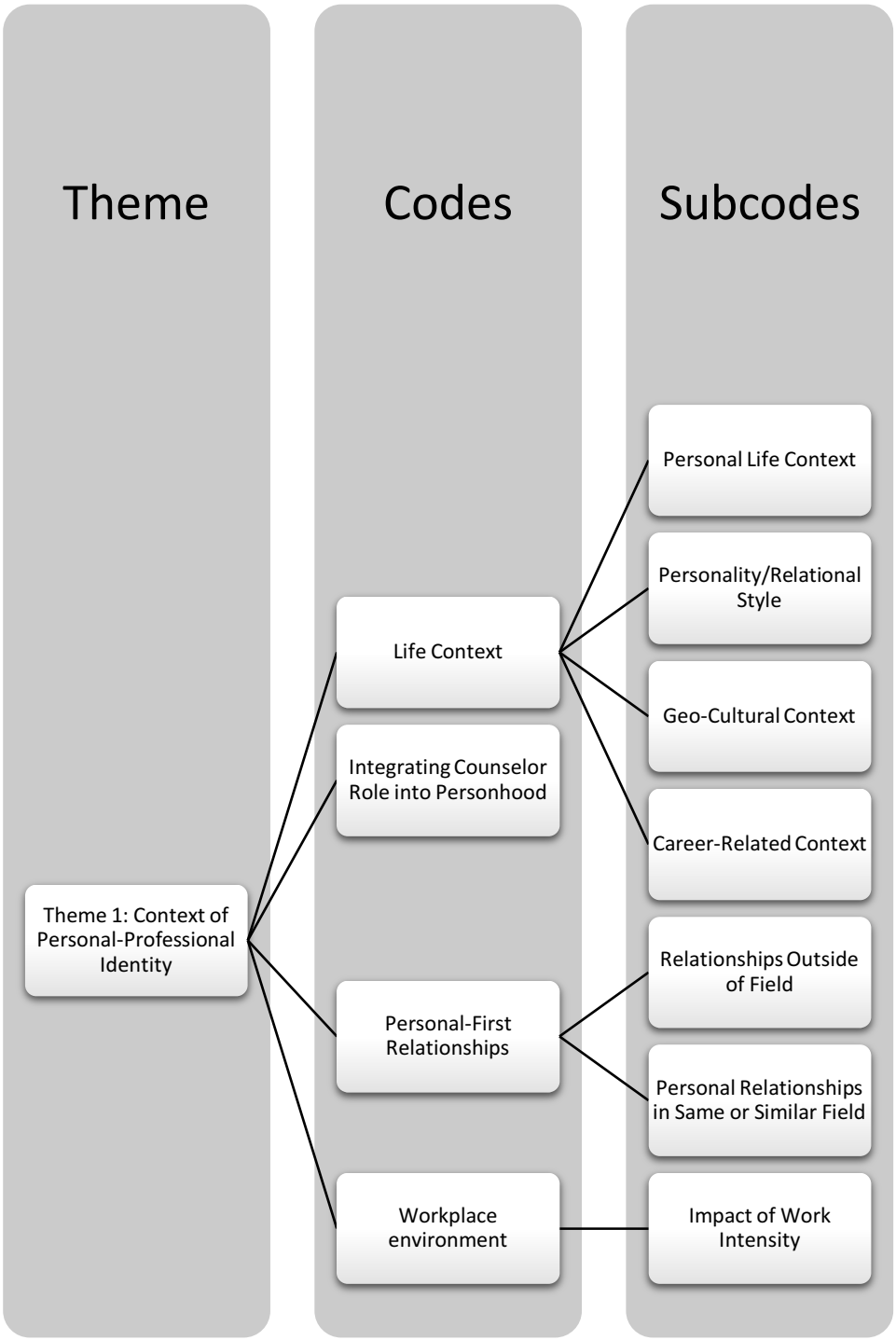


Figure 4.1: Theme 1 Coding Tree

included both negative and positive nodal events and changes. Alex reported that the death of his father soon after graduation delayed his entry into clinical practice and shaped his sense of professional identity. Beth stated that a recent health scare triggered an increased closeness with her sister, who now "checks in" on Beth's personal and professional wellbeing. On a more positive note, Greg and Hank discussed how having children caused them to reevaluate their values and the emphasis they place on clinical practice.

Several participants also noted personality traits as important factors in their professional relationships and identity. I organized these traits into the subcode *personality/relational style*. For example, Dana reflected, "I'm a really laid back outgoing person, I—I feel like I form relationships really easy" then, "Now, the depth of those relationships is completely different. I think I have just kind of, yeah I'll get to know you and I'm—I'm friendly and everything, but then when it starts going deep, I kind of draw that line." Lily explained that her tendency to be quiet or reserved around others shapes how she forms interpersonal connections, "I don't do so well with seeking out relationships. Usually they have to be structured into something." These traits extend beyond the professional role, serving as a component of participant identity and context for both personal and professional experiences.

The next contextual domain I identified in the data, *geo-cultural context*, includes factors of the geographical, community, and cultural setting in which participants live and work. Several participants noted ways their geographical location or cultural surroundings impacted their client population and professional development. Dana, who practices in a small town in the Southeastern US, discussed the impact of negative attitudes toward the LGBTQIA community on her clients and her values as a therapist, stating, "I've had to learn, um, to tune out the attitudes and the prejudices around me and focus on the human being in front of me." Kacie

explained that, due to limited resources and resistance to social justice advocacy in her rural Northwestern US setting, she largely depends on long-distance relationships to connect regarding social justice issues.

Another specific life-domain involved participants' *career-related context*, including factors relating to their career path, decisions, and goals. Most participants discussed the impact of state licensure processes, including necessary supervision hours, clinical hours, and testing. Participants recognized securing a supervisor and completing tests as important developmental steps and often noted the impact of licensure requirements on professional experiences and decisions. For example, Francis discussed the challenges she faced when she left a position that provided clinical supervision for a position that did not. Now paying for supervision out-of-pocket, she explained that her previous weekly supervision now occurs "when I can afford it." Other significant components of participants' career-related context included the process of securing a job, pre-existing career identity (e.g., Alex and Greg entered the counseling field as an outgrowth of clergy roles), and ongoing goals (e.g., Beth discussed the recent decision to return to school).

Integrating counselor role into personhood. As participants described elements of their life context, each one discussed the process of integrating their professional counselor role into their broader identity as people. For instance, Ellen discussed ways in which counseling fits within her broader sense of purpose, commenting, "I don't want it to just be a job…I felt very drawn to this field because of how you're serving people…and I think that that is more than a job." Further, multiple participants discussed how they have situated the counselor role in relation to the other roles and values salient to their identities. Francis specified faith as the primary source of identity definition in her life, while both Hank and Greg described family roles

as more central than the counselor role. Francis, Hank, and Greg each noted a common function of this identity location, stating that establishing themselves in roles outside of the professional realm took the pressure off of their performance in the counselor role and allowed them to work with more confidence and freedom.

Beyond the process of situating counselor identity amongst other personal roles, participants noted ways in which their counselor identity and personal identity impact one another in a reciprocal process. Several participants noted ways in which counseling practice impacted their relationships with others. Dana expressed that practicing counseling skills has positively impacted her social self-efficacy and relationships, stating that counseling practice has "taught me how to be more patient with the people who are closest to me…I think it has made (personal relationships) better." At the same time, multiple participants noted the impact of personal identity and qualities on counselor identity. Julie noted, "I don't know how you can separate the two, because I think with counseling, you bring a lot of *you* into it." These reciprocating influences demonstrate the complex interplay of personal and professional roles constituting the process of identity integration.

Personal-first relationships. One of the most commonly discussed factors shaping the process of identity integration was relationships that initially or primarily existed in the personal realm. This code included those personal-first relationships that participants described as impactful on their professional development. As I noticed a more specific distinction in these relationships, I divided them into two basic subcodes: *relationships outside of field* and *personal relationships in same or similar field*.

Participants identified a variety of ways that relationships outside of the field impact their development and identity as counselors. Beth, Dana, Francis, Hank, Irene, and Lily each

described outside relationships that provided important emotional support. Irene discussed how her fiancé provides emotional presence and support on a regular basis, "There are days where I come home and I'm just emotionally and mentally exhausted, and, um, he's always right there to listen…" Beth reported that multiple family members are there to support her when she begins doubting her competence, "they're the ones that are my support saying, 'Well, you're getting this feedback and this is...working for you, so I think you're just…putting yourself down right now…'" Carla, Dana, Ellen, and Hank discussed ways outside relationships provided them with an objective or grounded perspective. Carla described how her boyfriend is able to offer a fresh perspective, "he comes from a very different professional field than I do and so…he provides a very…almost shockingly objective point of view sometimes." Carla also noted that her boyfriend's different career background enables him to "push me to…think about things in a new way," "provide that outside perspective," and help me keep "a more well-balanced view." Participants described these grounding perspectives as helpful for expanding self-awareness, approaching client cases, maintaining self-care practices, and other personal and professional tasks.

At least 10 of the 12 participants noted impactful personal-first relationships with individuals in the counseling field or similar professional roles (e.g., social work, school psychology, etc.). Beth, Ellen, and Greg disclosed that their spouses/partners work in the helping field. All three expressed that they have benefited from sharing professional experiences with their partner and learning from their partners' experiences. For example, Greg stated that his wife, who is farther along in the counseling profession, provides practical guidance through his training and development, advising him regarding which aspects to "worry about" and which he should not "sweat that too much." Beyond partner relationships, participants reported that they

were connected to other helping professionals through several personal life/community outlets, including extended family relationships, faith groups, and educational settings. Francis discussed the value she places on relationships with other professionals who know her on multiple levels, stating that these relationships enable her to talk about:

> …different parts of myself that are not the counselor 'Francis.' They're like, the 'Francis' that, you know, wants to buy a house or the 'Francis' that wants to be in a relationship or the 'Francis' that…whatever that might look like. Whereas, I'm usually just 'Francis' the counselor when I'm with, like, all my coworkers that are counselors.

Finally, Hank, Julie, and Kacie discussed the impact of their own therapists on their professional development. Each described the process of being a client as helpful for personal growth, clinical learnings, and adjustment to the counseling profession. Overall, participants espoused the benefits of relationships with diverse levels of professional commonality.

Workplace environment. A final major contextual factor for participants' professional experiences and development involves the relationships, dynamics, and physical space of their immediate work settings. Several participants noted that they had benefited from a generally positive and welcoming social atmosphere in the workplace. Kacie described the impact of the social environment on her ability to get to know her coworkers, "that kind of supportive, comfortable environment has really fostered that ability for me to go and make those connections with them." Some participants also discussed their experiences in changing work settings. Dana described her experiences transitioning from a busy inpatient setting with constant stimulation to a quiet private practice office where she was often alone. Irene discussed moving from an outpatient addictions treatment center where she built long-term relationships with clients and staff to a fast-paced Suboxone clinic where relationships turnover on a moment-to-moment basis.

Several participants also discussed the impact of tension and conflict in the workplace. For instance, Francis described a perceived uneasy relationship between members of two separate treatment teams in her former job. She described existing division with the following example:

> But, like they had a Christmas party and they didn't invite us and, like, things like that that just felt, like, a really big bummer. I would love to know my coworkers…and so that was rough and felt like that community was just very…not one. Not a community.

One aspect of the work setting participants noted as particularly salient regarding the level of staff harmony was physical office space. Lily expressed that she has regular conflict with employees from another company program with whom she shares office space. Beth expressed that sharing limited space with other medical staff increased stress and lowered morale (as evidenced by decreasing stress and increasing morale when Beth's team was eventually granted their own private office space). Hank, on the other hand, described benefits of being "isolated within my area of the building," noting this isolation enabled his team to practice with a sense of autonomy, freedom, and company trust.

A final factor of the workplace environment comprises the subcode *impact of work intensity*. Numerous participants discussed the impact of high demand, fast-paced work environments and the mentally and emotionally taxing nature of their work. Carla expressed her surprise at the constant activity of a clinical setting offering case management, therapy, and medication services, "It's just like a little hive, just going, going, going…in a way that I'm not used to." Beth depicted the sense of being on-edge in the psychiatric unit where she works, recounting occasions wherein clients made suicidal and homicidal threats as well as a recent instance in which a therapist was attacked by a client. Francis described a sense of being pulled

in multiple directions during her time as an in-home therapist, “getting texts from foster parents in the middle of the night and case managers and like, ‘oh this kid’s in crisis.’ Calls from their school, school counselors, what not.” Multiple participants described the adjustment to these intense work experiences as a learning experience, as Irene noted the challenge to “think on my toes” and Ellen expressed the fast pace “pushes you into developing a lot more quickly.” These experiences of challenge, learning, and adjustment are the focus of the next theme, Adjustment/Transition.

Theme 2: Adjustment/Transition

The second theme involves participant experiences and adjustments as they transitioned into the workplace following completion of their masters in counseling programs. Participants described the manner in which they adapted to new environmental structures and demands and discussed the impact of graduate school preparation and relationships. Participants also noted challenges that were particularly salient during this transitional process. Figure 4.2 exhibits the structure of codes and subcodes within this theme. I begin by discussing changes in participant relationships.

Evolution/adaptation of relationships. Participants described several different ways in which personal and professional relationships evolved during their development as counselors. Multiple participants described distancing themselves within relationships they perceived as becoming unhelpful or harmful. Francis stated that some personal relationships she maintained during graduate school were no longer sustainable with the increasing stress of her first counseling job. She said, “It was so draining. The complications of being in those relationships were so, um, just difficult, um, because of me going from seeing maybe eight kids a week in internship to 25.” Kacie questioned a relationship with a peer from her master’s program that

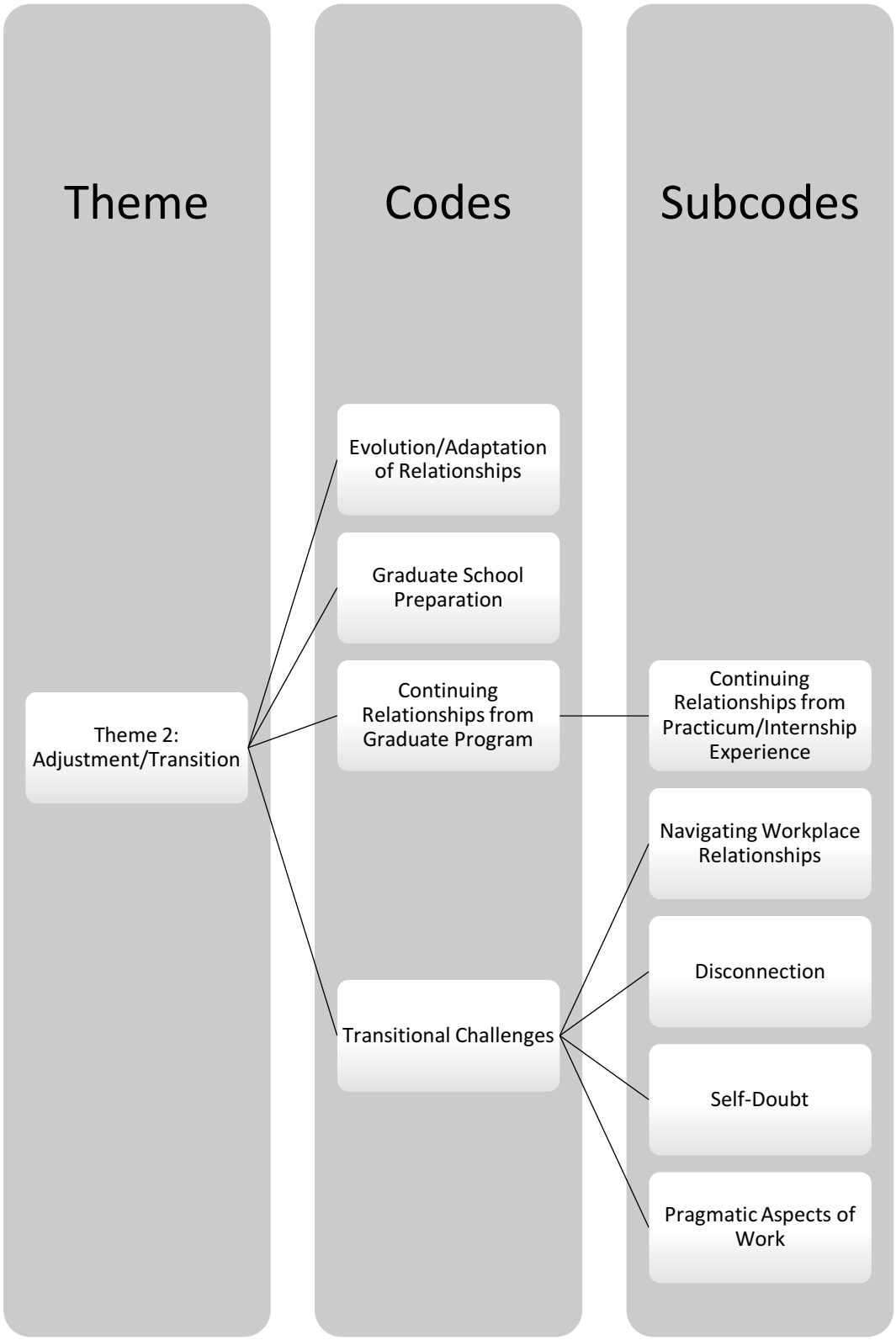


Figure 4.2: Theme 2 Coding Tree

became unhelpful when she experienced support as becoming one-sided (i.e., Kacie needing to support friend rather than reciprocal support).

Several participants discussed a gradual decreasing of dependence upon professional supports as a result of their own growing self-efficacy. Both Irene and Julie stated that they sought external advice with less frequency than they did previously, with Irene explaining, "now I tend to try something first, and then if I'm really struggling, *then* I go for guidance." Beth further described the changing role of support amidst her own development, "I'm more stable now. It took a year to get to that confidence point, but now it's just more like a benefit for growth rather than a dependency on it."

At the same time, some participants described an increase in consultation and communication with other professionals. Dana and Ellen both stated that they have become more likely to consult with their coworkers and peers as they have continually learned to utilize the knowledge of counselors around them. Further, Beth described improvement in her ability to communicate her developmental needs to supervisors and colleagues as an important part of her professional growth. Dana maintained that training in her graduate program directly impacted the development of her relationships and overall capacity for interpersonal connection, noting she learned to be "more vulnerable" with those around her. I further discuss participant experiences and assessment of graduate school preparation in the following section.

Graduate school preparation. Participants pointed to level of preparation upon completing their masters in counseling program as a factor in their developmental path. Ellen explained that having faith in her training experience helped her endure challenges in the transition to practice, as she stated, "trusting and having confidence that I was at the right place and where I had been told I was developmentally. That—especially that first month—that was

something that I had to remind myself of pretty often." On the other hand, several participants discussed limitations they perceived in their training. Beth, Dana, Ellen, and Francis discussed the struggle to apply core learnings from school to a wide variety of specific clinical challenges. Beth described the differences between learning course material and practicing in the field:

> …actually sitting in front of a person, having a conversation, I knew what questions to ask, but then they wouldn't answer the questions, because they're not a textbook, not like you read. You know…these are real people in a hospital.

Alex and Greg noted a lack of training regarding business-centered aspects of the counseling profession and Beth, Carla, and Irene discussed feeling unprepared for diagnosis and documentation. These practical elements of practice form the *pragmatic aspects of work* subcode, which I discuss later in Theme 2 (under the *transitional challenges* code). Multiple participants acknowledged that some limitations are inherent to the nature of training. Dana, Irene, and Kacie each stated a version of the phrase, "they can't teach you everything" and Irene pointed to the importance of continued development through supervision and continuing education inherent in the licensure process.

Continuing relationships from graduate program. In addition to direct learnings and preparation experiences from masters in counseling programs, participants described continuation of relationships with peers, faculty, and internship connections as impactful upon their development. Each participant discussed, at minimum, continued relationships wherein they "check in" with contacts from their masters programs, and most participants described deeper ongoing relationships. Dana and Francis, graduates of two separate counseling programs in different cities, both disclosed that their cohorts stay in close contact via social media groups and regular get-togethers. Ellen described an ongoing sense of "community" with members of her

cohort. She explained that she has not yet been at her job long enough to form close, open relationships, so she continues to lean on her former classmates for connection and encouragement.

Participants likewise discussed maintaining relationships with counseling program faculty members in a variety of ways. Dana, Lily, Beth, and Hank disclosed that they are receiving clinical supervision from a former professor. Hank explained that, despite initial concerns about potential boundary issues amid the dual roles, his small-town setting provided limited options and his former professor and advisor was the most qualified person for the job. Alex, Ellen, and Julie described specific instances of seeking out consultation with former professors regarding issues of clinical practice and professional development. Dana and Hank introduced yet another type of ongoing connection from their graduate school experience. During their masters programs, both were tasked with an assignment in which they were to interview a practicing counselor in the community. Dana maintained contact with the clinician she interviewed and the person became a collegial contact in the community. Hank later reached out to the person he interviewed and began receiving therapy from this individual.

The relationships participants continued from their practicum and internship experiences form a distinct component of graduate school relationships (i.e., subcode *continuing relationships from practicum/internship*). Eight of the twelve participants became employees at their practicum or internship sites. Beth and Francis expressed a sense of encouragement and validation receiving a job offer from their internship site. Dana described the value she ascribes to the connections she made during internship:

> You never know what's going to open up, what opportunity is going to present itself, and you want to have those connections so that they know when something comes up that

> they hear about, they think of you. And that's what happened with me getting the position I (recently started).

Beyond the issue of finding and securing a job, several participants discussed other ways in which internship relationships have been supportive in their development. For example, Carla described her internship site staff as her "professional family." She stated that, although she does not currently work at her internship site, she continues to receive professional guidance and maintain a close, personal connection.

Transitional challenges. Participants discussed multiple challenging experiences as a part of their transition from graduate school and ongoing development in counseling practice. I organized prominently-discussed challenges into four categories, forming the subcodes *navigating workplace relationships*, *disconnection*, *self-doubt*, and *pragmatic aspects of work*. *Navigating workplace relationships* involves the process of understanding and working through workplace relational dynamics, including adapting to relational conflict, tension, and expectations. Several participants discussed the negative impact of particular social practices in the workplace. Dana discussed feeling bothered by coworkers she believes socialize "at the expense of the client," while Ellen stated that relational dissension in the workplace "pulls away from the whole part of why we're there, which is to be there for the clients." Francis, discussing the personal impact of negative workplace dynamics, described an instance in which her team was not invited to a staff party as "a really big bummer." Participants described several methods of managing these experiences. Francis often consulted with personal friends (outside of her company) for advice on handling workplace drama. Carla reported that her boss serves as a "gateway to other people" in the office, helping her avoid unnecessary conflict and navigate relationships effectively. Kacie and Hank described processing workplace relational dynamics in

clinical supervision. For example, after developing and identifying romantic feelings for an intern supervisee, Hank disclosed his feelings to his clinical supervisor. He stated that this disclosure enabled him to receive guidance to handle the situation appropriately and increased the level of closeness and trust in his relationship with his supervisor.

The next subcode, *disconnection*, involves participants' description of experiencing isolation or distance from people or resources. Several participants discussed feeling impacted by limitations in their access to support or guidance. Beth described the shift to working without the structured support of graduate school, "I didn't have somebody in the room with me anymore. I was by myself." Lily described a struggle to find emotional support in her professional relationships, noting that other professionals tend to go into "fix-it mode" when she wants to vent and feel heard. Other participants portrayed an absence in social connection. Hank posited that his age, other life roles as a husband and father, and rural context have prevented him from developing meaningful contacts with peers in the counseling profession. He stated that supervision can provide a "degree" of this social connection, but explained, "it's not the same as having sort of, someone I can go get a beer with and talk about therapy." Multiple participants noted that disconnection created and exacerbated the next subcode, self-doubt.

Self-doubt includes participant experiences of insecurity, uncertainty, and low self-efficacy. Several participants discussed moments wherein they doubted their competence and fit for the field. Some participants disclosed a long-term pattern of doubting their abilities and accomplishments. Dana and Hank both discussed a tendency to focus on negative performance and minimize personal and professional accomplishments. Lily disclosed that she struggles with comparing her performance to that of one of her coworkers, stating "I end up feeling very lacking after I compare myself to her." Ellen, Francis, Kacie, and Carla each expressed that

sharing their self-doubt experience with others was an important part of their coping and growing process. Carla specifically discussed the impact of openness and encouragement in her ongoing relationship with the staff from her internship site, stating, "having that particular group to kind of build you up, but also let you know that that thought itself isn't crazy…you know…that everybody has those doubts. That's been really important."

The final subcode under transitional challenges, *pragmatic aspects of work*, includes challenges and adjustments relating to practical elements of clinical practice. Participants described a variety of specific pragmatic tasks and adjustments that challenged them in some way. In part, these challenges depended on their work setting. For example, Alex and Greg both began working to establish private practice businesses after graduating. As a result, both described a heavy emphasis on business-related challenges, including creating and dispersing marketing materials, setting up technological services (e.g., website, credit card payment), and meeting with referral sources. Alex explained:

> It's all about the business side of things. How do I…how and who do I contact to develop a website, how do I, how do I get a website that works, um not one that's just there collecting dust. Um, how do I network? What are the costs? Um, it's been every time I turn over a rock there's 10 things that I just don't have money for and I put it back—*[laughs]* put it back down.

On the other hand, several participants employed at community mental health centers discussed the challenge of meeting the practical demands of a high client caseload. Ellen stated that her supervisor and fiancé (who is also a counselor) prepared her for the intensity of her job, yet she still struggled to adjust to the workload and found it "emotionally exhausting" to keep up with her clients and necessary paperwork. Kacie, Beth, and Carla discussed challenges related to

diagnosing clients. Carla stated that she had never diagnosed a client before beginning her job, as her internship site was a grant funded program where she was not required to diagnose. In order to adjust to a position where she was required to provide a "well-founded diagnosis" at the time of the first client appointment, Carla found her "binder from diagnosis class" and reviewed it at work. Irene discussed the unique challenges of working alongside medical professionals, as she had to become familiar with medical language and procedures and learn to quickly transition different clinical roles. Participants also noted specific tasks such as completing treatment planning procedures, writing case notes, filling out tax and insurance forms, and learning new computer systems as impactful parts of their transition to clinical practice. In the following section, I discuss how participants experienced growth amid these challenges and transitions.

Theme 3: Growth Orientation

The third theme centers around participant experiences of growth. Participants described factors and resources that facilitated professional growth as well as active efforts and strategies through which they sought and achieved growth. Professional growth, in the context of participant expressions and, thus, this theme, involves ways in which participants perceived and articulated increased knowledge, self and other-awareness, clinical competence, professional self-efficacy, and autonomy. Figure 4.3 displays the structure of codes, subcodes, and specifiers within this theme. I begin by discussing a factor that every participant noted as helpful for growth, *exposure to diversity*.

Exposure to diversity. Participants described encountering and processing new ideas, resources, experiences and ways of thinking as a factor that prompted their growth. Alex and Dana explained that they frequently asked other professionals to recommend books and other

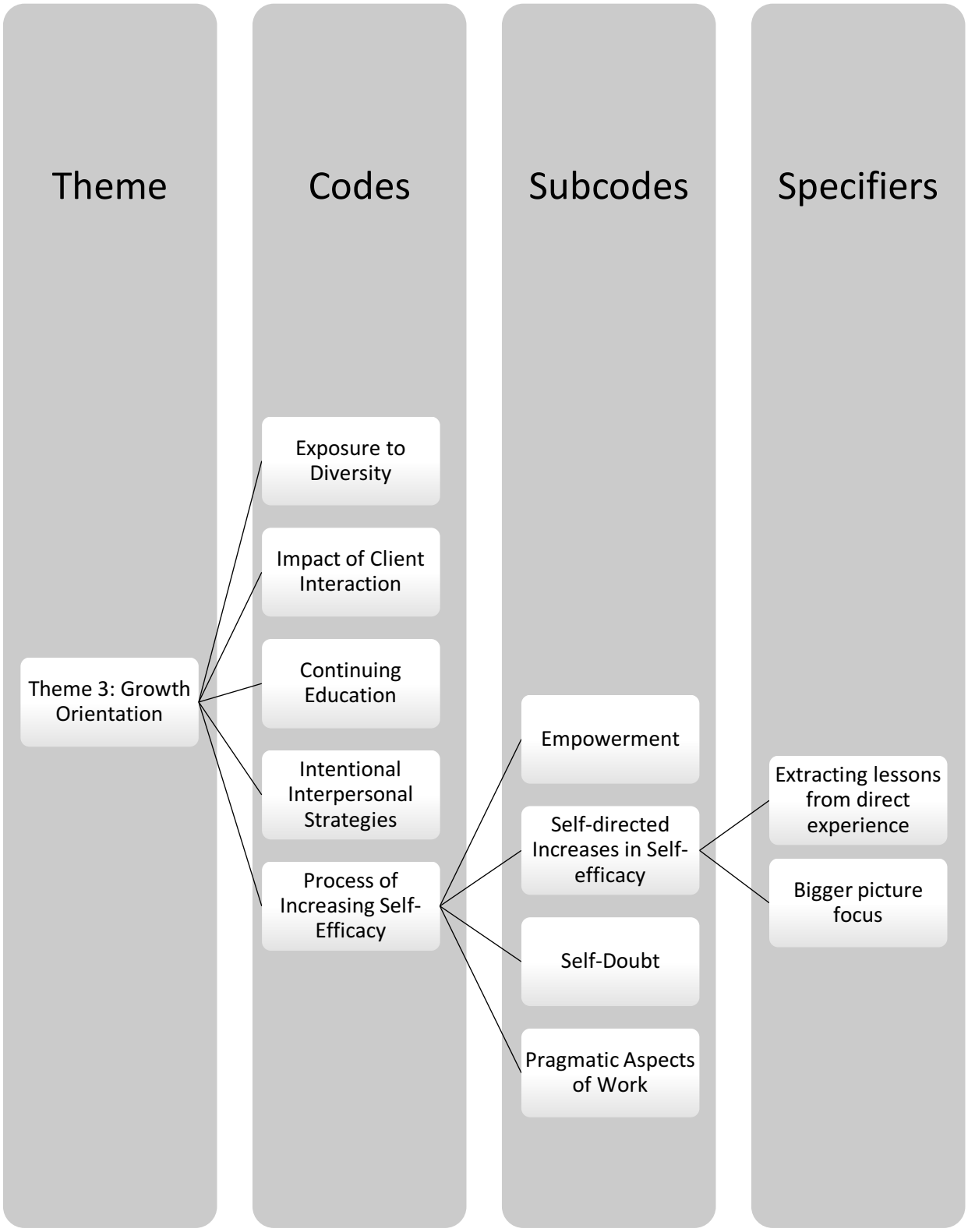


Figure 4.3: Theme 3 Coding Tree

resources of which they may have previously been unaware. Ellen, Alex, and Lily described continually using a method of interpersonal processing. Lily described other individuals as "sounding boards" with whom she could generate and receive new ideas. Several participants discussed the value of having diverse backgrounds and ways of thinking within their supportive relationships. Greg stated that he intentionally "cultivates" relationships with people whom he believed can help him "pay attention to the world" in new ways. Francis described the value she placed on diverse "mentor" relationships in this way, "so there's a benefit to kind of dipping my toes into different pools…and being able to, like, have mentors from like, spiritual mentors, relationship mentors, and um, they all provide that level of support."

Participants also discussed growth experiences resulting from work with professionals who represented different clinical approaches and backgrounds. Carla and Francis explained that they reached greater understandings of the medical field as a whole through working alongside case managers, nurse practitioners, nursing staff, Department of Children Services case workers, and other medical staff members. Kacie disclosed that her clinical director represented a different professional identity (clinical psychologist) but shares her theoretical orientation (person-centered therapy) and noted that it is "kind of neat to see where our training crosses over." Beth collaborated daily with a psychiatrist who is originally from another country. Beth described the impact of her collaborator's differences in profession, cultural background, and experience level, "she has been such a big help in my development, because she—we work with the same people. And…she has a different—she's been doing it over 20 years." Finally, several participants expressed that exposure to diverse client backgrounds and issues have significantly impacted their professional growth. I further discuss this component of diverse experiences within the following section, *impact of client interaction*.

Impact of client interaction. Several participants discussed ways in which face-to-face interaction with clients facilitated their professional growth. Dana described clients as central to her ongoing process of increasing multicultural awareness and sensitivity, particularly regarding experiences and challenges of LGBTQIA peoples. Dana explained that, through client interaction and processing in supervision, she has continually become more aware of messages within her cultural setting and her own implicit biases. Julie described how her self-awareness has increased as she has processed experiences of countertransference. As she has encountered personal challenges in working with specific clients, she has processed these challenges within supportive relationships and come to understand new parts of herself. Carla, Beth, and Irene each noted that facing a wide variety of client issues has expanded the breadth of their clinical competence and increased their confidence. As Carla stated, "ultimately it's good to see, like how am I as a counselor going to face certain situations."

Finally, Hank discussed ways clients have influenced his growth on both personal and professional levels, describing the impact of client interactions on his sense of wellness, meaning, and purpose. He stated:

> Obviously I've done everything not to make it about me in therapy, but what happens in therapy, seeing people who are so immensely strong and brave, and seeing them grow and, just, you know, find new parts of themselves, or find a new way of understanding the world—you know, all that stuff. The magical, wonderful stuff that happens when therapy is going well, like, that just does my heart good. It just makes me feel…like, it makes me feel hopeful, and it makes me feel closer to people...

Continuing education. Participants described several ways in which they accessed and utilized formal educational resources and direct clinical instruction as a part of their professional growth. Alex, Greg, Hank, and Julie discussed attending trainings, seminars, and online courses to increase their knowledge-base regarding specific clinical approaches, client issues, and other elements of clinical practice. Ellen and Lily revealed that they often consult with coworkers about specific client issues and relevant resources. Ellen provided the example of asking a coworker, "Someone's coming in for anger management; do you have something specifically you use when you work with someone with anger management?" Several participants described "education" as a key piece of their work with supervisors. Francis stated that she goes to her supervisor with questions about specific issues such as diagnosis and ethical situations and Beth stated that her supervisor fills a "research role" in which he helps her stay up current regarding research in the counseling profession. Multiple participants noted that learning and receiving instruction is ongoing in the process of development. Dana stated that masters in counseling programs provided only a "foundation" upon which counselors continue to build. The following section includes ways in which participants worked to continue growing through intentional efforts in relationships.

Intentional interpersonal strategies. Participants described several deliberate, specific strategies which they used to build helpful relationships and access support in order to foster continued growth. Strategies included methods of building and strengthening relationships as well as making decisions in seeking and accessing support. Alex and Greg described growing their network of supportive relationships by asking existing contacts to connect them with additional individuals who might be helpful for a particular issue, creating a snowball effect.

Dana, Kacie, and Ellen stated that they regularly reach out or "check in" with other professionals with the primary purpose of strengthening professional rapport. For example, Ellen explained that, while she is introverted by nature, she challenges herself to reach out to her coworkers and lay foundations for supportive relationships she knows will be important later. She stated that she issues herself the challenge,

> Sometimes, go ask a question. You haven't been down that side of the hallway all week, you don't really have a question, think of a question. Go ask a question, because it just—then when you do have a question, you're going to feel comfortable going down there. Um…those kind of things. So that's something I'm still, like, consistently trying to push myself into... on a, um, weekly basis.

Some participants described an intentional process regarding what individual they go to in order to meet certain needs or address specific concerns. Francis and Lily each discussed a method of directly matching specific issues with specific supportive individuals in their lives. Julie, on the other hand, described a "trickle down" system. She explained that she may first seek help from more surface-level relationships (such as a coworker) and, if she does not receive an answer that she trusts or that fully addresses the issue, she takes the question to more trusted relationships, a process that eventually leads to her clinical supervisor.

Process of increasing self-efficacy. As participants discussed their growth and development as professionals, they described an ongoing process of increasing belief in their knowledge and abilities and sense of autonomy in practice. Participants attributed their growing confidence to a variety of experiences, such as external feedback from supervisors or direct client results, time and opportunity for practice, and intentional efforts of continued learning. Three aspects of the process of increasing self-efficacy that were particularly prominent in the

data were *empowerment*, *self-directed increases to self-efficacy*, and *external validation/affirmation*. I further describe these three categories, which I divided into subcodes, in the paragraphs below, beginning with *empowerment*.

Participants discussed ways in which others *empowered* them to develop positive self-efficacy. Several participants noted a sense of being "pushed" by supporters. Dana, Irene, Julie, and Carla described a process of balanced guidance or challenge, in which supporters offered a guiding hand without being prescriptive or directive. Dana stated, "(my supervisor) doesn't feed me information. He challenges me to find the solution for myself." Ellen, Hank, Julie, and Beth described feeling positively impacted by receiving the trust and respect of authority figures and colleagues. Hank stated that his clinical director has demonstrated trust and granted him freedom to try new things in his work, which he said was "helpful in me learning to trust myself." Beth reported that, when she became discouraged with systemic issues in her work setting, her clinical supervisor empowered her to implement changes into the system rather than leave her job. Francis, Beth, and Hank specified that having the opportunity to take leadership roles with interns also helped them to feel more competent and established in their role.

The second subcode within the process of increasing self-efficacy is *self-directed increases to self-efficacy*, which includes ways that participants actively take steps and make decisions to increase competence and self-assurance. Ellen and Greg described a sense of self-determination to take responsibility for their own growth in certain ways and, as Ellen stated, "figure this out for yourself." Dana, Irene, and Carla discussed the importance of self-acceptance and internal trust, letting go of rigid expectations and trusting that they are competent enough. Carla stated that she learned, "even if I don't feel totally competent, just kind of trust in the fact that…I'm semi-competent to have gotten this far." Lily stated that continuing her work while

persevering through a family crisis helped sure up her sense of confidence and quieted some of her doubts.

Within the subcode *self-directed increases to self-efficacy*, I noted two specifiers to further categorize participant expressions. The first specifier is "big picture focus." Four participants (Ellen, Francis, Greg, and Irene) noted that, as they began to feel comfortable with more concrete aspects of the counselor role, their focus gradually shifted to broader, more abstract areas of development. Ellen explained that after she felt comfortable with "ABCD and…all these specific things," she moved into "a phase more where I do need more conversations about those bigger picture things…" The second specifier is "extracting lessons from direct experience." Six participants (Beth, Dana, Ellen, Francis, Hank, and Kacie) described a process of reflecting on specific events in their practice and drawing lessons for their continued development. Beth noted that, after observing a coworker's negative behaviors with a client, she reflected on how she may meet her own self-care needs to avoid engaging in similar actions. Hank expressed that he receives valuable lessons from direct interactions with clients, stating:

> I feel like that's sort of a process of clients are always, sort of, I'm on this road…and I may be veering off to the right, but they are always there to sort of push me back to the middle. And sometimes I veer off to the left and they are there to push me back in the middle.

The third and final subcode under the process of increasing self-efficacy is *external validation/affirmation*. Participants described multiple ways in which external validation related to their professional growth. First, eight participants (Alex, Francis, Hank, Irene, Kacie, Lily, Beth, and Carla) stated that external validation or affirmation is an important component of the

interpersonal support that has helped them develop. Irene discussed the value she places on affirmation from both personal and professional relationships:

> I definitely have family members, people in my life who encourage me. Um, they'll, you know, just bring out my strengths, so that helps me realize, you know, that this is where I'm supposed to be. Especially coworkers giving good feedback in, like, staff meetings if somebody sits in on a group I'm running. To hear that encouraging feedback is also helpful in knowing that I made the right decision.

Second, four participants (Ellen, Francis, Kacie, and Beth) noted that they perceive a decreasing *need* for external validation as an indicator of their growth. Kacie discussed how her needs have begun to change over the months since she began practicing:

> hopefully *[laughs]* not needing as much, like, external validation from peers, colleagues, you know, supervisors. Really kind of finding that intuition and kind of knowing…where to…work, like what areas need to be worked on with a client, you know, and not always having to… go to someone and be like, "I have no idea what I'm doing!" you know, like, every day that I'm at work.

Participant examples of external validation or affirmation included receiving concrete, positive results from client work (e.g., therapy successes, positive survey results), praise or acknowledgement of a 'job well done' from professional authorities, and "normalization" of participant challenges and feelings of self-doubt.

As is clear in the previous paragraphs, many of the factors and experiences relating to participant growth involved interpersonal relationships. In the following section, I describe ways in which participants described organizing their interpersonal relationships in the context of their

developmental support. These organizational patterns form the fourth theme, Network Organization.

Theme 4: Network Organization

The fourth theme, Network Organization, includes participants' descriptions of relationship network structure and qualities of interpersonal connections. For the purpose of this theme, the term "network" includes relationships that participants deemed impactful for their professional development. Participants described multiple ways in which they organized, conceptualized, and made decisions regarding network relationships. I identified three major constructs within participant discussions of network organization that formed the codes within this theme: *network boundaries*, *power differential*, and *external structure in relationships*. *Network boundaries* are imaginary lines that determine the nature and scope of developmental relationships. *Power differential* describes the power discrepancy between each participant and a given network member. *External structure* refers to circumstances of life and work that determine network relationships outside of participant choice (e.g., terms of employment, social contract). Figure 4.4 exhibits the structure of codes and subcodes within this theme. I begin with a discussion of network boundaries.

Network boundaries. Participants distinguished between network relationships in multiple ways. These distinctions included the level of closeness in relationships (*proximal boundaries*), the types of support specific network members offered (*role boundaries*), and the degree to which overlap or spillover occurred between particular roles (*role boundary permeability*). These three distinguishing factors constitute the first three subcodes in this section. The fourth and final subcode is *boundary decisions*, which involves participants' decision-making processes in creating, maintaining, and altering network boundaries. I briefly

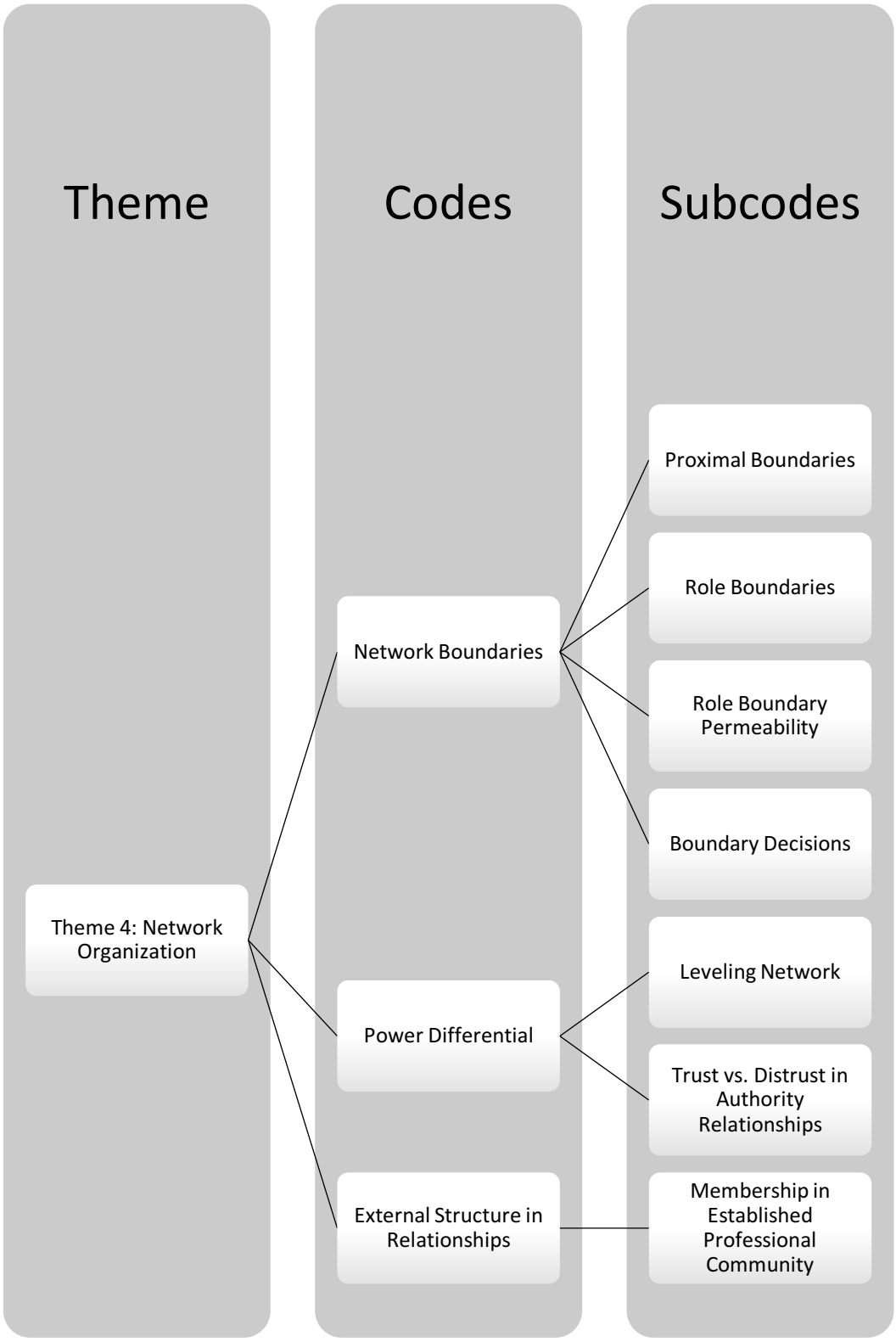


Figure 4.4: Theme 4 Coding Tree

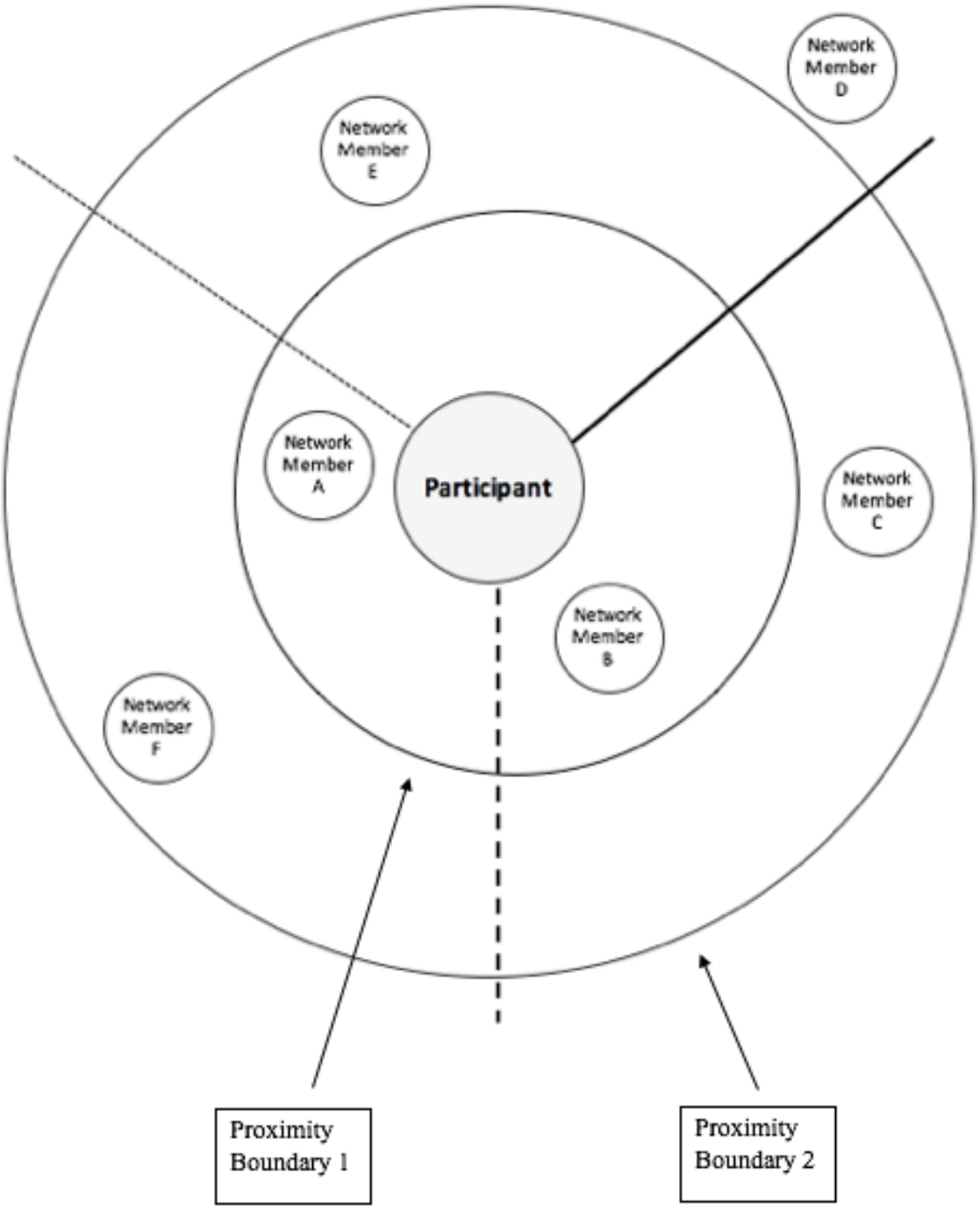
discuss each of the four subcodes in the paragraphs below, beginning with *proximal boundaries*. Figure 4.5 visually demonstrates the constructs of *proximal boundaries*, *role boundaries*, and *role boundary permeability*.

Every participant described levels of closeness or distance (i.e., *proximity* to participant) within network relationships. For example, Dana discussed the order of closeness she perceives in the context of her professional development, with her spouse being closest and most impactful, followed by her clinical supervisor, then more tangential relationships. One way participants measured and described closeness related to the amount and type of information they are willing to share with each network member. Ellen, Julie, and Kacie each stated that they will hold back personal elements of their clinical work (i.e., issues of countertransference or insecurity) from coworkers and share these issues with their clinical supervisors. Julie described the professional relationship within which she shares most openly:

> …my supervisor, LPC supervisor, is… the person who I really, I feel like, I can be the most vulnerable with, maybe, like to really say how I'm really feeling about something, versus my work supervisor, who I talk to…but maybe wouldn't be as detailed.

Another measure of closeness related to the presence of friendship or personal connection within professional relationships. Carla stated that she considers many of the individuals from her former internship site to be close friends with whom she can share several different "aspects" of herself.

A final way participants delineated closeness was through limitation. Beth, Lily, and Hank each described a finite number of people in their closest circles of impact, with Lily noting she only makes room for "one or two stars" within her closest professional circle. In Figure 4.5, the two circles around the "Participant" demonstrate proximal boundaries. "Network Member A"



*Circle lines represent proximal boundaries *Straight lines represent role boundaries

*Solid vs. dotted straight lines represent differences in boundary permeability

Figure 4.5: Network Organization Visual Model

and “Network Member B” represent a participant’s closest network members, while “Network Member D” represents a member whom the participant considers as more distant or tangential. I refer to the smaller circle as “Proximity Boundary 1” and the larger circle “Proximity Boundary 2,” continuing this sequence to label increasingly distant boundaries. Each successive proximal boundary distinguishes an added layer of distance. For instance, an individual might trust Network Members “A” and “B” with a particular piece of personal information that they would not share with Network Members “C,” “E,” and “F.”

The second subcode within network boundaries is *role boundaries*. All 12 participants described boundaries determining the ways in which they accessed and received support and the types of support they received (i.e., determined the *role* of the supportive person). Several participants described categories in which they conceptualized specific supportive relationships. For example, Alex identified three broad categories of support, “family, school, and licensure.” Greg described a category of people he can contact when he faces an urgent need, calling them “in-case-of-emergency-break-glass kind of people.” Beyond categorization of support, role boundaries also determine the size and magnitude of supportive roles. For instance, Hank, Kacie, Dana, and Julie each expressed that their clinical supervisor fills the largest and most prominent role. Hank explained that his supervisor holds the largest role not only because he has the strongest impact on his development, but also because he influences Hank on a number of different levels. Hank stated that, in addition to “providing…clinical material” his supervisor “challenge(s) me to…understand what’s going on in myself as I’m providing therapy, where I’m getting caught, where my transference is, um, where my own insecurities are coming out.” The process of Hank’s supervisor taking on multiple roles is an example of *role boundary permeability*, the third subcode.

Role boundary permeability is the degree to which spillover or overlap occurs between roles. This includes multiple network members filling one role or one person filling multiple roles. Participants varied in their comfort with and willingness to accept role spillover. For example, Lily explained that she maintains firm role boundaries throughout her network, stating, "they each sort of fill, like their own niche. And, um, I don't like them to overlap." Carla described variety in the firmness of role boundaries in her network of support. She stated that she works to maintain professional and personal relationships as "separate parts of my life." However, she described overlap in relationships with internship site staff whom she identified as close friends. Some participants noted that boundary crossover is sometimes unavoidable. Both Kacie and Hank expressed that their rural settings limited the quantity of relationships, creating significant overlap in roles and relationships. Kacie disclosed that her clinical director is also her landlord; Hank noted that, due to his lack of peer counselor relationships, his clinical supervisor also fills a social-professional role.

The *role boundary* and *role boundary permeability* constructs are both represented in Figure 4.4 by the straight lines stemming out from the "Participant." The lines divide the field into three sections, each representing different categories of support or influence. The lines vary in their thickness and solidity, demonstrating the firmness of each role boundary. For instance, the line on the right is solid and thick, which might represent the firm boundary Lily described regarding her supporters and the roles they fill (e.g., she would look for clinical guidance and emotional support from different network members).

The fourth and final subcode under network boundaries is *boundary decisions*, which includes the processes by which participants make decisions in implementing, maintaining, and altering network boundaries. Participants described a number of different considerations that

factored into their boundary decisions. Several participants stated that level of "trust" plays a significant role in these decisions. Carla stated that she only seeks advice from "people who I feel are very well qualified." Further, Dana stated that she remains careful in accepting guidance from a particular clinical director because "(I'm) not sure I can completely trust the information that I get from her 100%." Alex, Kacie, and Hank expressed that personal experience over time is an important factor as they decide who they will allow to be close to them or fill certain roles. Kacie described the difference between her openness with coworkers and her clinical supervisor:

> just like different levels of sharing, like personal history I guess. 'Cause I mean, these people don't know me, I don't really know them, so there's still a certain level of…figuring each other out *[laughs]*. Um, with my supervisor, I'm definitely a lot more willing to…share information about myself that I wouldn't necessarily want other coworkers to know about, or…that they really need to know about.

Greg stated that choosing a professional "lane" (e.g., professional identity, therapeutic orientation, population focus) has been a guiding force in his network relationships, as that has influenced the network members he has sought out.

Power differential. Power dynamics also played a role in participant descriptions of network organization. Participants described several relationships with power disparity, including those with supervisors, administrative authorities, and counselors with more experience. Irene expressed that power plays a salient role in early counselor development stating, "…I still feel like I'm very new to the counseling world, so I feel like I'm kind of at the bottom working my way up." Participants discussed positive and negative ways that power dynamics impacted their development. I categorized participant discussions of power differential into two subcodes, *leveling network* and *trust vs. distrust in authority relationships*.

The first subcode, *leveling network*, includes processes and experiences of network relationships becoming more *level* in regard to power. Within participant reports, networks became more level in two basic ways: 1) through participant development (i.e., rising toward developer's level) and 2) developer lowering or extending self to establish sense of equality. Several participants noted experiences of their own development changing power dynamics with developmental figures. Beth described how her perception of her clinical supervisor changed over time,

> I thought he was way up here, and I was way down here *[one hand much higher than the other]*. Now, I feel like we're pretty much equals. That's changed drastically, uh, because he's given me so—so many…things that I can work on myself that empowered me and made me feel like a better clinician. So now, I still think he's above me, but not as big as before. I feel like I'm—I'm more towards his level now, which is really nice.

Several participants similarly noted an adjustment from perceiving self as lower, newer, or subordinate in relation to others, to considering these same individuals as "colleagues."

On the other hand, multiple participants described measures that developers took to demonstrate respect or a sense of equality. Ellen and Julie both noted their value of advanced professionals who were willing to "come alongside" them in their development. Carla described several ways that members of her internship site staff continued to establish a sense of equality in their relationship. She explained that these individuals commonly utilize a "self-deprecating" sense of humor and an openness about their mistakes to create an "equal playing field." Every participant expressed valuing equality, respect, empowerment, and mutual trust in their relationships. In the next subcode, I specifically discuss the impact of trust within power-disparate relationships.

The second subcode, *trust versus distrust in authority relationships*, include the factors that established trust in relationships between participants and authority figures and the impact of trust level in these relationships. Several participants described examples of professional authority figures demonstrating trust in their abilities by granting autonomy in their work. Hank stated that trust from his clinical director enables him to "just be myself," developing his own therapeutic style and approach. Julie and Ellen described the sense of empowerment they feel from having freedom in their work, expressing appreciation that they are not "micromanaged." Carla, Ellen, and Irene reported that receiving clear expectations and feedback is an important part of establishing trust with their bosses at work. Carla and Ellen both expressed frustration over supervisors in the past who were uncomfortable delivering negative feedback. Ellen stated, "You know, if I'm doing this paperwork wrong, I don't want to be doing it wrong for three months before someone finally tells me."

Julie, Francis, Beth, and Carla expressed that the ability to be vulnerable and receive forgiveness and understanding is an important part of building trust in relationships with authority figures. Carla described a recent instance in which she made a scheduling mistake and appreciated her boss's understanding and trusting response, "she recognized that I'm probably going to beat myself up over that more than…like, she doesn't need to add anything to that." Beth discussed the importance of trusting authority figures enough to be open and accept feedback even if it is negative, as she stated that her supervisors "can be critical without me falling apart." Conversely, Lily discussed her struggle to trust and open up to her clinical director, "I always expect to get reprimanded for everything. And, nine times out of ten she doesn't even care or reprimand me. It's just a longstanding, I guess, fear I've always had of

getting in trouble." In all, participants expressed that trust with authority impacts the nature of their professional relationships and the course of their development.

External structure in relationships. Participants discussed multiple types of relationships that were initiated or governed by external structure. Examples include family relationships, work structures, and other social contracts. Kacie noted that a significant portion of her professional relationships have been determined by her work setting, stating, "moving to a community mental health agency as a provisional therapist, I mean, you're, kind of at the whim of the people you work with." Several participants stated that their clinical supervisor served a primary role in their professional development and noted that this relationship formed as a result of state licensure requirements. Further, multiple participants described the impact of professional support from built-in family and social relationships. Francis disclosed that she lives in an "intentional community" of friends with whom she shares a similar faith. She reported that this group impacts several aspects of her life, including her professional perspective and development.

I designated one subcode under external structure in relationships, *membership in an established professional community*. Five participants (Beth, Carla, Francis, Greg, and Kacie) expressed that they consider themselves a part of a larger community of counseling professionals, while one (Hank) stated that he has been seeking this type of community. Beth, Kacie, and Francis stated that they feel this sense of community among the counselors in their workplace. Francis, who worked at her former internship site, described the setting as a close-knit community and stated, "it's great to, like, belong somewhere and…that's really vital to the work experience." Greg and Carla described communities outside of the office. Greg discussed his membership in an outside "group supervision collective," while Carla referred to her former

internship site staff as her "professional family" and an important ongoing community. Participants described several factors that connect them to supportive relationships. These factors are the subject of the following theme.

Theme 5: Connective Tissue

The fifth and final theme, Connective Tissue, involves factors participants indicated were significant in initiating and maintaining relationships with network members. Participants described common experiences that linked them with supportive people, services that supporters offered, and behaviors and qualities of supporters they strived to emulate. Participants expressed that these relational dynamics facilitated their professional development and prompted them to deepen connection in relationships. Figure 4.6 displays the codes, subcodes, and specifiers within this theme. I begin by discussing connective qualities of shared experiences and viewpoints.

"Gets it." Several participants stated that they feel encouraged and connected when they feel that another person understands their experience or perspective on a meaningful level. Five participants (Carla, Dana, Ellen, Kacie, and Lily) specifically used the term "gets it" to refer to a person or persons who demonstrates this type of connective understanding. Several participants described benefits of feeling that a supporter understands them as a *person*. Dana and Ellen both expressed that their partners understand them on a meaningful level, which enabled them to offer deep layers of support. Dana discussed the experience of talking to her husband at the end of a workday:

> …just being present at the end of a long hard day. He's present, and I don't feel like I have to force him to understand. He just takes it as it is, and he gets it. He understands. So… it's almost an unconditional, he knows me, flaws and all, as much as I've allowed him to see. And he gets it, and just lets me be.

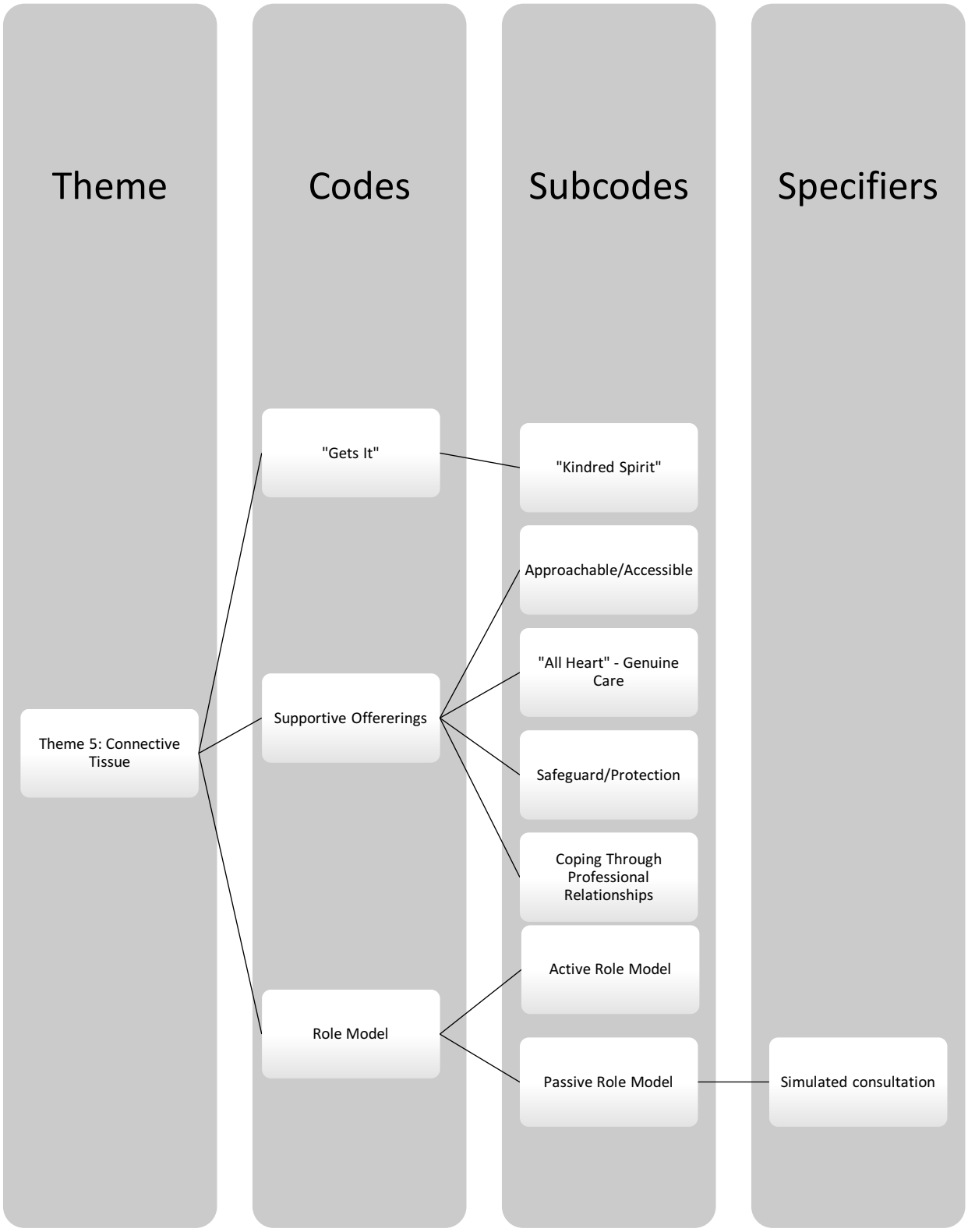


Figure 4.6: Theme 5 Coding Tree

Similarly, Ellen described the unique support her fiancé (who is also a counselor) is able to offer, stating that she "understands uniquely the experience of coming home feeling kind of drained," and, understanding this experience, she checks in with Ellen regarding her self-care and ongoing wellness. Other participants discussed the impact of professional relationships in which they feel personally understood. Hank expressed that his clinical supervisor (who was his professor and advisor during graduate school) "already knows me very well, knew me from school, knew my particular interests." Kacie expressed how she feels understood in her continuing relationship with the university supervisor from her internship, "She and I are just, we're really opposites in a lot of ways, but at the same time, like, we just get each other. Um, so that's been kind of nice to have that person to go to and be like, 'Is this…like, am I doing this right? Is this normal?'"

Participants also reported benefiting from supporters who understood the nature of their experiences. Francis discussed several experiences that she values being able to share with other new clinicians, including her insecurities and clinical mistakes. Alex and Greg discussed impactful relationships with other counselors who work in faith-based settings, while Lily and Carla both disclosed feeling comforted and relieved by relationships with colleagues who understood the challenging social "atmosphere" within their workplace settings.

In addition to the value of feeling understood, several participants discussed the impact of supporters with whom they share commonalities, forming the subcode "*kindred spirit*." While Alex provided the term "kindred spirit," several participants espoused their value for relationships with individuals who share their personality traits, clinical perspectives, values, or worldviews. Dana discussed a meaningful commonality with her clinical supervisor with whom she shares a "mutual vision for what this community needs." Ellen and Carla expressed that they

have purposefully formed relationships with other counselors who share a "similar philosophy" regarding clinical practice and life more broadly. Carla described commonalities she shares with members of her former internship site, stating, "our philosophes are very, very similar…in terms of how we view the world, what we view is important…the ideal population that we would like to work with is all the same." Relationships involving a common bond or perspective constitutes one aspect of being connected through understanding.

Supportive offerings. Participants described particular services or contributions that facilitated their connections with supporters and/or promoted professional growth. I organized these supportive offerings into four subcodes: *approachable/accessible*; *"all heart" – genuine care*; *safeguard/protection*; and *coping through professional relationships*. I first discuss the impact of supporters' *approachability and accessibility*. Participants expressed that they value relationships wherein they a) feel comfortable initiating contact with the individual and b) are able to communicate their message and receive a response. Ellen and Carla described professional relationships in which they do not have regular contact with the individual, but the knowledge that the individual is accessible is helpful. Ellen stated, "just the fact that she's on site and…I know if I had a question, knowing I could go to her. And she kind of set the tone for me to feel supported." Francis described her office as an "open environment," stating she feels comfortable approaching several different coworkers when she encounters problems or challenges. Alex expressed appreciation and a sense of trust in knowing that his clinical supervisor is "available beyond the scheduled hours."

The second subcode, *"all heart" – genuine care*, includes experiences wherein supportive individuals demonstrated genuine care by going above and beyond participant expectations of their role. Alex provided the phrase "all heart" as he listed ways in which family

members, colleagues, his clinical supervisor, and other individuals have gone out of their way to help him as a professional, concluding with, “that’s all heart right there.” Several participants described their appreciation for supporters who exceed their expectations with gestures of support. Carla discussed an experience that solidified her trust and connection with her boss. In her interview for the position, Carla mentioned her interest in a particular therapeutic training. Months later, when funding became available, her boss remembered Carla’s interest and arranged for her to receive the training. Carla reflected on her gratitude and recognition of the gesture, “that was just like, something she knew, not only for this job, but for my future as a therapist, like, she was like, thinking about that.”

The third subcode, *safeguard/protection*, involves supportive individuals offering participants a sense of safety or security. At least 10 of the 12 participants discussed feeling protected by a supportive person in some way. Ellen expressed that knowing other professionals are monitoring her work with clients helps her feel more confident, as she knows someone will correct her if she is “doing something that’s not healthy for my clients.” Similarly, Greg, Hank, Irene, Julie, and Beth described professional relationships that helped them identify and work through “blind spots” in their clinical practice.

Francis described security as the primary role for her clinical supervisor stating, “I am technically sort of under his license so he is taking a risk and I feel like I’m paying him for the risk, not for…super in-depth, like, direct help, um so to speak.” Further, Kacie compared her professional supports to a safety net underneath a trapeze act, as she stated:

> it's kind of felt like, at least those three primary people, my colleague, my supervisor, my clinical director, have been that safety net. Um, they've told me, you know, multiple times, you know, I'm obviously working under supervision, of my supervisor, so I'm

> provisional at this point. And, you know, I've come to them a couple of times like, 'Oh, this situation seems pretty risky.' You know, 'I'm not sure how to go forward from here.' And they've just been like…you know…if there's any risk that does come back, it falls on them and the agency, and not just on me. Um, so, in terms of…recognizing that it's not just me alone in the field by myself. Like, I have these people that, I can turn to"

On the other hand, Lily described a negative experience involving authorities monitoring her work. She reported that a supervisor expressed concern for her after a significant family crisis, encouraging her to take time off. Lily stated that she felt "really, really angry" and that this concern demonstrated a lack of trust in her abilities as a therapist.

The fourth and final subcode is *coping through professional relationships*, which includes interactions in professional relationships that participants use to cope with challenges and issues. Multiple participants disclosed experiencing emotional exhaustion through the course of intense clinical work and described ways they coped with these experiences in a social context. For example, Lily stated that she finds relief in "venting" with a coworker, while Beth and Carla discussed valuing the use of humor as a method of coping in the workplace. Ellen and Francis discussed the impact of sharing experiences and encouragement with former graduate school cohort members and other new therapists. Francis expressed that her colleagues are able to remind her that her work has meaning—especially when she feels that she is not making a difference with particular clients. Carla stated that the closeness in her relationships with members of her former internship site staff enables her to "intermix" casual and "heavy" topics. She said, "the conversations could switch easily from those casual things right towards…you know, 'I have a client, and I just don't know what to do', or 'I feel like I'm not doing a good job.' And it can switch just like that and it would be easy, it would be easy to switch to that."

Role model. Every participant noted advanced counseling professionals they respected, admired, and/or sought to emulate. I identified role model status as a factor that facilitated the impact of supportive or inspiring persons upon participants' professional development. I aggregated participant descriptions of role models into two subcodes: *active role model* and *passive role model*. I first discuss *active role models*, which include role models who engage in hands-on, active interactions with participants. Kacie and Alex described the impact and patterns set forth by individuals who have gone down paths that are very similar to theirs. Kacie continues to learn the ins and outs of her particular company and office from her more advanced coworkers and Alex gleans assistance from an individual who holds a similar church-based counseling position. Alex described how he reached out to this role model from the outset of his interest in counseling:

> …he was the first person I called when I started exploring this idea. Hey, how did you do it? How did this happen? What was the requirements? How did the…what was the set up? And all that kind of stuff, and he's been real impactful.

Lily expressed that her mother is a role model in regard to her ways of being with clients and coworkers. Lily also described one coworker in particular as "kind of who I wish I could be when I grow up."

In addition to role models with whom they have ongoing interaction, multiple participants discussed role models who influence their decisions and actions without intention or awareness (i.e., *passive role models*). Participants described passive role models who guide their practice although they have never met or their contact has ceased. Greg discussed the impact of professionals he follows through their publications or trainings, explaining that he is guided by "these kind of academician or, uh, authorial voices that I don't have any connection with on my

end, but their work kind of informs what I do." Lily talked about the continued impact of working with her internship site supervisor, who she no longer contacts. She stated, "she doesn't know it—but she still influences a lot of how I do clinical counseling now."

Within the subcode *active role model*, two participants discussed a particular type of guidance that I denoted with the specifier "simulated consultation." Irene and Carla both discussed a process of imagining a consultation with a supportive person they could not access in the moment. Irene discussed a friend and fellow counselor trainee who died while they were in graduate school together. She stated that she regularly considers the advice she might receive from her in a particular circumstance and sometimes asks, "What would you do in this situation?" Carla discussed the ongoing influence of her internship site supervisor and reported that, when faced with a clinical dilemma, she will often consider what actions her former supervisor might take. These simulated consultations demonstrate one of the ways supportive relationships continue to impact development in the absence of reciprocal contact.

Summary of Chapter

In this chapter, I reported the findings from my study of the developmental networks and interpersonal support of beginning counselors. Through a content analysis of 12 interviews with beginning counselors, I identified five major themes: *Context of Personal-Professional Identity*; *Adjustment/Transition*; *Growth Orientation*; *Network Organization*; and *Connective Tissue*. I presented these themes by describing conceptual and organizational aspects of the codes that formed each theme. I also provided excerpts and descriptions of individual participant statements as well as patterns across participant statements to exemplify codes and themes. Finally, I provided visual representations to further facilitate a clear representation of study findings. In the next chapter, I provide a discussion of findings in relation to the study's research questions and

pertinent theoretical lenses. I also discuss limitations of the study, implications for relevant professionals, and suggestions for future research.

Chapter Five: Discussion

In this chapter, I discuss the findings of the present study in regard to the study research questions and existing theories of counselor development and developmental networks. This directly ties the findings to the study's central purpose and questions and situates the study's findings within existing theoretical structures. I also provide limitations of the study, implications for relevant professionals, and recommendations for future research. I begin with a discussion of the findings in regard to the study's research questions.

Findings Address Research Questions

The purpose of the present study was to investigate and describe the experiences of beginning counselors as they engage in and seek interpersonal supports, including their expressed needs and goals, the makeup of their developmental networks, and their perspectives of professional-social environmental factors influencing their development. Stemming from this purpose, I employed the following research questions for the study:

1. How do beginning counselors experience developmental networks?
    a. How do beginning counselors engage in (i.e., actively initiate and/or passively join) developmental network relationships?
    b. How do beginning counselors describe the makeup of their interpersonal supports?
2. How do beginning counselors perceive the role of interpersonal support in their growth as counselors?
    a. What developmental needs do beginning counselors meet or attempt to meet through interpersonal connections?

b. How might professional-social environmental factors shape (e.g., foster, deter) growth for beginning counselors?

In this section, I discuss ways in which the five major themes I discussed in Chapter 4 address the research questions.

Research Question 1

The first research question for the study is, "How do beginning counselors experience developmental networks?" Elements of four of the five major themes offer significant contributions in addressing this question: (Theme 1) *Context of Personal-Professional Identity*; (Theme 2) *Adjustment/Transition*; (Theme 4) *Network Organization*; and (Theme 5) *Connective Tissue*. The first theme, *Context of Personal-Professional Identity*, includes the ways in which contextual factors (i.e., personal life, personality, geo-cultural, career-related, and the workplace environment) impact professional development and the formation and nature of relationships. Participants described differences in interpersonal dynamics based on their personal life and career settings. For instance, Alex and Greg described experiences of isolation within independent practice settings and, consequently, identified primary sources of professional support as pre-existing family and personal relationships with members of the helping fields. Conversely, Beth described her work environment (psychiatric hospital) as dependent on close collaboration as a clinical team, leading her to consider her coworkers as a significant part of her developmental network. Further, Hank described his rural setting and developmental stage (early thirties, married with multiple children) as factors that prevent him from developing the supportive professional network he "craves." Multiple participants echoed Hank's description of the challenges of practicing in rural areas. Carla stated that, although months have passed since she graduated from her masters program, she has been unable to begin clinical supervision due to

her time-consuming commute and the lack of supervision resources in her rural practice setting. Similarly, Kacie described the increased need to lean on long-distance relationships with individuals from her masters program due to a sense of isolation in her rural surroundings. These findings demonstrate the types of contextual factors that impact beginning counselors' experiences of developmental networks and reveal the profound degree to which particular factors, such as community setting, can shape beginning counselors' experiences.

The second theme, *Adjustment/Transition*, displays how developmental networks form and function as beginning counselors shift from graduate school to the workplace and adapt to new roles and challenges. Participants expressed that their developmental networks change over time in response to the changes in needs and settings that are inherent to participants' development. Network changes involve both patterns of actual interaction (e.g., the frequency with which Carla and Lily contact impactful internship site supervisors) and the meaning assigned to particular relationships (e.g., Beth, Irene, and Julie felt less dependent upon professional relationships across time). This fluid quality of network relationships suggests that beginning counselors experience developmental networks in different ways at different times and that relational engagement is a continual process rather than a static formation.

Another significant element of the second theme involves participant descriptions of relationships and resources carried over from graduate school. Several participants expressed valuing strong ongoing relationships with professors and classmates. Meanwhile one participant (Greg) stated that he wished his program had utilized a cohort model so he could have built stronger relationships with his classmates. These findings suggest that the carry-over of graduate school relationships may be a significant factor in beginning counselors' experience of developmental networks.

In the fourth theme, *Network Organization*, three core constructs (network boundaries, power differential, and external structure) describe the structure and qualities of relationships impacting participant development. Participants described varying levels of closeness in their network relationships and delineated ways in which they categorize developmental support. Several participants noted mutual trust as a crucial factor in their boundary decisions, particularly in relationships with inherent power disparity. Participants expressed that they value authority figures who trust them enough to allow autonomy and grant them a voice in the workplace *and* in whom they have confidence regarding their levels of competence and integrity. These findings suggest that levels of mutual trust play a significant role in shaping the boundaries, and thus, the general make-up, of beginning counselors' developmental networks.

The fifth theme, *Connective Tissue*, includes factors participants described as significant in forming and maintaining network connections. Participants discussed commonalities and particular types of developmental support that are meaningful within their developmentally-focused relationships. In essence, participants expressed that they are likely to seek out relationships in which they have important values or experiences in common with supporters, receive a sense of genuine care and security, and desire to emulate some aspect of supporters' lifestyle, skills, or practice. These cohesive elements may stand as significant factors regarding how beginning counselors engage in and describe the makeup of developmental network relationships. In the following section, I discuss ways in which study findings address the second research question.

Research Question 2

The second research question for the study is, "How do beginning counselors perceive the role of interpersonal support in their growth as counselors?" Three of the five major themes

address this question: (Theme 1) *Context of Personal-Professional Identity*; (Theme 2) *Adjustment/Transition*; and (Theme 3) *Growth Orientation*. The first theme, *Context of Personal-Professional Identity*, describes ways in which interpersonal contexts and the workplace environment impact participants' professional growth experiences. Participants described the roles of personal, professional, and overlapping (i.e., both personal and professional) relationships in developing an integrated professional identity. Participants expressed that it was important to access support in multiple life domains in order to develop professional skills and knowledge while remaining grounded in one's personal identity and perspective. Several participants noted characteristics of the workplace environment that impacted their developmental and interpersonal experiences. Participants expressed that intense, fast-paced environments presented significant challenges to adapt quickly. However, participant statements suggested that, in the presence of accessible supportive relationships, these challenges provided opportunities for significant growth.

The second theme, *Adjustment/Transition*, contains specific challenges participants faced as they transitioned into counseling practice. These challenges (*navigating workplace relationships*, *disconnection*, *self-doubt*, and *pragmatic aspects of work*) presented developmental needs which prompted participants to adapt through interpersonal relationships. For example, participants described multiple sources from which they sought guidance to deal with workplace tension and conflict. Francis sought counsel from personal friends, Carla received guidance from her direct boss, and Lily processed the conflict with her mother. These findings suggest particular needs for which beginning counselors seek developmental support in both professional and personal relationships.

The third theme, *Growth Orientation*, describes interpersonal relationships and interactions through which participants experienced professional growth and development. Participants described exposure to diverse perspectives and experiences as a significant factor impacting their ongoing professional growth. These diverse experiences included observing and learning different clinical approaches from their professional relationships, working with unfamiliar client issues and populations, and accessing new educational resources. Participants expressed that professional growth experiences contain an interplay between self-directed and others-directed developmental actions. Self-directed steps included intentional efforts to access and foster needed supports, learning lessons through direct experiences, and developing increasingly complex conceptualization skills, while others-directed measures included providing affirmation and empowering participants for new challenges and responsibilities. The interplay between self and other-directed development demonstrates the continuously changing role of interpersonal support. These findings suggest experiences and interactions that form the role beginning counselors perceive interpersonal support plays in their professional growth.

Findings in the Context of Existing Theories

In this section, I discuss how the findings of the present study from the perspectives of a counselor development theory and a developmental network theory. Since this is the first known work applying developmental network theory to counselor development, examining findings through each of the theoretical structures enables me to more thoroughly situate the study's findings within both branches of existing literature. I begin by discussing a theory of counselor development.

Ronnestad and Skovholt's Theory of Counselor Development

In this section, I discuss the findings of the present study through the lens of Ronnestad and Skovholt's (2003) phase model of counselor development, with particular emphasis on the phase that intersects with the focus of the present study. Ronnestad and Skovholt described the time period directly following graduate school as comprising the Novice Professional Phase. As I discussed in the literature review, the authors described three stages that are typical of this developmental phase: "Seeking to *confirm* the validity of training;" "*disillusionment* with professional training and self;" and "*exploration* into self and the professional environment" (Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2003, p. 17). Participants in the present study described experiences that shared similarities with these three stages. Several participants expressed that they felt prepared immediately following graduate school, but met unexpected challenges upon beginning clinical practice. Irene reported that she remembers questioning the state licensure requirements for supervision after graduate school, asking "Why can't I just be an LPC?" She added, "…and then I get in the field, and I'm like, 'Yeah. No, I definitely need a couple years of supervision.' So it was just funny to see that transition. You think you know everything coming out of grad school."

Ronnestad and Skovholt (2003) similarly described a process of beginning counselors' excitement and naivety meeting unexpected challenges in practice. The authors described challenges that include feelings of isolation, a sense of inadequacy, and struggle to meet the daily demands of practice. These challenges are similar to the *transitional challenges* I identified within the theme *Adjustment/Transition*.

As a result of these unexpected challenges, Ronnestad and Skovholt (2003) asserted that beginning counselors typically experience *disillusionment* with themselves and their graduate training. Participants in the present study varied in their reporting of disillusionment experiences.

Several participants expressed feelings of frustration or inadequacy in certain aspects of training upon beginning clinical practice. Greg offered perhaps the strongest expression of disillusionment with training, stating he fears the degree may easily be "superfluous." However, three participants (Dana, Irene, and Kacie) stated that the limitations of training are understandable and to be expected, and expressed their gratitude for ongoing training through supervision. Further, Ellen stated that, through reminding herself that her professors and supervisors regarded her as competent, she was able to feel reassured when facing new challenges for which she felt unprepared or inadequate. Ronnestad and Skovholt's construct of *disillusionment* with self shares similarities to the self-doubt experiences participants described in the present study (under *transitional challenges* code). Participants discussed self-doubt experiences stemming from long-term personal struggles, feeling that they are unqualified or inadequate within the presence of clients and more advanced clinicians, and challenges in adjusting to changing settings or responsibilities.

Ronnestad and Skovholt (2003) stated that these experiences of challenge and disillusionment generally lead to "a more intense *exploration* into self and the professional environment" (p. 17). The authors' concept of *exploration* may be reflected in participants' expressions of professional growth (including increases in self-awareness, self-efficacy, and clinical skill) in response to challenges they faced in clinical practice. For example, Dana, Julie, and Hank each discussed interactions with clients that challenged them and directly prompted them to reach new levels of self-awareness by processing these experiences in clinical supervision.

Ronnestad and Skovholt (2003) also claimed that, through the novice developmental phase, counselors begin to become aware "that one's personality is expressed in one's work" (p.

19). This awareness constitutes a process by which new counselors integrate their personal and professional selves or identities. This integration concept fits within the code *integrating counselor role into personhood* (under Theme 1: *Context of Personal-Professional Identity*). Within this code, participants discussed the process of situating the counselor role within their personal identity and recognizing ways in which personal traits manifested within the counselor role.

Overall, Ronnestad and Skovholt's (2003) conceptual description of beginning counselors aligns well with findings within comparable aspects of the present study. The authors' theoretical contribution also provides additional conceptual language (e.g., disillusionment, exploration) by which I might consider and discuss findings going forward. However, the present study contributes findings beyond the scope of Ronnestad and Skovholt's research and model, including contextual factors shaping new counselors' development and identity (*Theme 1: Context of Personal-Professional Identity*), more detailed descriptors of counselors' growth processes (*Theme 2: Adjustment/Transition*; *Theme 3: Growth Orientation*), and structural and procedural descriptions of developmental relationships (*Theme 4: Network Organization*; *Theme 5: Connective Tissue*). In the following section, I discuss a developmental network theoretical model in order to more fully situate the findings of the present study in the existing literature.

Developmental Network Theory

Higgins and Kram (2001) introduced the term "developmental network" along with conceptual dimensions used to describe qualities of developmental networks. The authors described *developmental relationships* as everyone a central person identifies as "providing developmental assistance (i.e., career and psychosocial support)" (p. 269). They also used the following qualifiers to clarify the developmental network construct: developmental network

relationships must be concurrent (i.e., existing together at a single point in time, not collectively over time) and developers must be active in the life of the central person (i.e., ruling out influential people with whom central person has no current interaction). Higgins and Kram provided two dimensions by which to consider developmental networks: *network diversity* and *strength of ties*. *Network diversity* essentially refers to "the number of different social systems the relationships stem from" (p. 269). The authors proposed that a more diverse network provides less redundancy and, thus, a larger supply of meaningful support and resources. *Strength of ties* refers to "the level of emotional affect, reciprocity, and frequency of communication" (p. 269). The authors suggested that stronger relational ties involve "greater amounts of support" and "relatively more psychosocial assistance than weak-tie developmental relationships" (p. 270).

The qualifiers and dimensions I described above form a narrower and more specified scope than the focus of the present study, as I broadened my focus to interpersonal supports in general (rather than limiting the study to exclusively developmental network relationships). In this section I consider findings through this more specified lens Higgins and Kram (2001) provided. The authors' qualifiers requiring that developmental network relationships be concurrent and active is consistent with the definition of "developmental networks" that I used throughout this study and that I provided to participants when using the term during interviews. However, this limitation is narrower than the report and discussion of findings which I derived from participant responses. I included participant descriptions of support from influential individuals who were supportive in the past (e.g., Lily's former internship supervisor, Irene's friend and colleague who died during graduate school) and those with whom participants have no interaction (e.g., Greg's description of impactful authors). Eliminating these relationships would

have the benefit of simplifying developmental networks to a finite and manageable number of relationships. For instance, Hank described only two developers who are intentionally and continuously assisting in his professional development. Examining Hank's network with this limited perspective would allow for a more specified and detailed analysis than I have been able to provide here. Such examinations may be a meaningful action for future research studies and analytic procedures.

The first dimension of developmental networks that Higgins and Kram (2001) described was *network diversity*. The level of diversity within participant networks varied. For instance, Alex identified active developers from a number of different life-domains (e.g., clinical supervisor, family members in helping field, church members in helping field, and continued contacts from graduate school) while Kacie described developmental network members from only two domains (current workplace and graduate school). Based on participant responses, I estimated that six participants had developers from four or more domains (higher diversity), two participants had developers from three domains (intermediate diversity), and four had developers representing two or fewer domains (lower diversity). Consistent with Higgins and Kram's assertions, participants with higher diversity (e.g., Alex, Beth, and Francis) generally expressed feeling adequately supported with a wide range of resources, while multiple participants with lower diversity (e.g., Hank and Kacie) expressed that they lack important resources and would like to access a wider network. The concept of *network diversity* is also consistent with the present study's code *exposure to diversity* (within the theme *Growth Orientation*), which several participants identified as a factor promoting professional growth. These findings support Higgins and Kram's emphasis on diversity as a significant construct within developmental networks and an indicator of network effectiveness.

The second dimension that Higgins and Kram (2001) provided was *strength of ties*. All participants described variance in the strength of relationships within their individual networks. I described this variance in "closeness" (a similar concept to strength of ties) with the subcode *proximal boundaries* (within the code *network boundaries*, theme *Network Organization*). Consistent with Higgins and Kram's (2001) proposal, all participants in the present study expressed that their closest developmental relationships provided both career and psychosocial oriented support. For instance, Carla described her internship site staff as close friends and influential professionals and Julie discussed several coworkers who support her both personally and professionally.

Regarding additional components of the *strength of ties* construct, participants in the present study described experiences of reciprocity and frequency of contact. Several participants discussed reciprocity as a quality they value in close developmental relationships. For example, Beth discussed the importance of contributing her own voice among developers and Lily described her most influential supportive relationship as one in which she was able to offer "mentoring" in return. The concept of reciprocity is also reflected in the subcodes *leveling network* (within the code *power differential*, theme *Network Organization*) and *empowerment* (within the code *process of increasing self-efficacy*, theme *Growth Orientation*).

Some participants diverged from Higgins and Kram's (2001) perspective that higher frequency of contact is an indicator of a stronger relationship, expressing they felt closest and most supported by individuals with whom they have less contact due to circumstances. Carla expressed that she has less ongoing contact with members of her internship site because she is not currently working there. However, she described these relationships as primary in regard to closeness and influence, explaining that she can access them at any time. Likewise, Kacie stated

that a former university supervisor is a close and significant source of support in her development, however she is unable to have frequent contact due to their geographical separation. These and other participants described strong, reciprocal relationships in which they received emotional support without necessarily engaging in frequent contact. Thus, the findings of the present study offered mixed levels of support for Higgins and Kram's construct of strength of ties. Participant expressions supported the importance of emotional affect and reciprocity as indicators of network relationship strength, but did not yield consistent support for frequency of contact as a significant indicator.

Overall, participant expressions were fairly consistent with Higgins and Kram's (2001) findings and theoretical structures. While the present study is broader in focus that Higgins and Kram's theoretical work, developmental network theory offers important terminology and conceptual contributions for discussing and considering study findings. In the following section, I discuss limitations involved in the present study.

Limitations

It is important to acknowledge this study's limitations as I consider and report the research findings. First, I analyzed the study data as a single coder. I acted alone in reading the raw data and forming and applying codes. This limited the potential for triangulation and diverse perspectives within the analysis process. I mitigated this limitation by consulting with my dissertation chair as well as a peer reviewer, as I described in Chapter Three.

Another limitation involved the lack of diversity in participant demographics. I utilized widespread and diverse marketing and recruiting strategies to seek study participants, but the participant sample still presented limitations regarding diversity. While participants were quite diverse regarding some demographics (e.g., developmental life-stage, university attended, work

setting, and population served), they lacked heterogeneity in others. Most notably, all 12 participants self-identified as White or Caucasian. This sample presents a significant limitation of racial diversity. However, it may be indicative of the racial demographics of the counseling field, particularly within the southeastern state in which eight of the participants lived and practiced. The lack of geographical variety represents a second limitation related to diversity, as only four participants (one in Northwestern US; three in Northeastern US) lived and practiced outside of the aforementioned southeastern state.

A final limitation in the study was the lack of a distinct literature foundation for the developmental networks of beginning counselors. The lack of literature on this subject made it difficult to establish a direct context for interpreting data and discussing study findings. In order to mitigate this limitation, I constructed a thorough literature review and examined findings using theories from both branches of research. Further, I hope this study will serve as a foundational context for future research on the developmental networks of beginning counselors.

Final Researcher Reflections

From the beginning I was aware that the topic of this research was deeply personal for me. It is only now, nearly four years removed, that I am beginning to understand just how anxious and out of place I felt in my first year as a counselor. My personal connection with the subject presented the challenge of deeply held biases and assumptions. In the past year and a half I have taken several steps to increase my awareness of these biases and find ways to minimize their impact on the study. These steps included several vulnerable conversations with my dissertation chair, continuous reflection on my experience as I constructed the research proposal (particularly the literature review), engaging in a bracketing interview, and keeping a weekly

research journal (complete with occasionally unhinged emotional expression) through the processes of data collection, analysis, and reporting.

The data collection process felt relatively natural, as my presence and mindset in interviews were similar to that of a counseling session. However, I was often aware of the need to avoid significantly influencing participant expressions and, as a result, I tended to remain relatively tight-lipped and stiff during interviews. I did notice myself loosen up as the role began to feel more natural in later interviews. Though I tried to remain neutral during interviews, I noticed myself perk up in particular moments. When participants discussed intentional efforts to overcome professional challenges, extraordinary acts of support from developmental supports, and their own experiences of deep care for clients and colleagues, it was both exciting and inspiring. Part of me thought "this is gold!" while the other part felt moved.

The data analysis process fanned the flames of my emotional reactions to participants. I was most surprised at how frustrated I felt at times. Perhaps it was the long stretches of highlighting lines and staring at a laptop screen, or maybe it was the experience of reading the the same conversations repeatedly. Reading and re-reading transcripts, I traversed the emotional spectrum. I laughed as I related with participant descriptions of uncomfortable social tension in the workplace, softened my eyes reading raw statements of insecurity and the weight of the counselor's role, and sighed loudly observing myself struggling to direct participants to the next question in the interview. I reflected on these emotional experiences regularly through the research journal as well as discussions with my dissertation chair and peer reviewer. I monitored these experiences closely in effort to minimize their influence and ensure that participant expressions drove data interpretation rather than my own perspective.

Frustrations and challenges aside, I remained consistently excited throughout the data collection and analysis processes due to my belief that this is important information. I believe the findings of this study will permanently shape my understanding and perspective of counselor development and relational support. I hope they will also carry meaning for others in the field in some capacity.

Implications

The findings of the present study are not generalizable beyond the study sample and should not be assumed to represent the experiences of all beginning counselors. However, participant expressions may articulate experiences that are relevant for other beginning counselors. They may also offer counselor educators, clinical supervisors, and other counseling professionals important things to consider as they seek to facilitate the professional development of new counselors and counselor trainees. In this section, I discuss implications for counselor educators, supervisors and other clinical professionals, and beginning counselors.

Counselor Educators

Counselor educators may play a pivotal role in the formation of beginning counselors' developmental relationships by addressing this subject while counselor trainees are still in graduate school. Counselor educators can begin by openly discussing challenges counselors may face as they transition from graduate school to practice, potentially including isolation, self-doubt, and disillusionment (Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2003). In order to mitigate disillusionment and hopelessness, it may be helpful for counselor educators to emphasize that training is an ongoing process that will continue after graduation. This arose as a helpful mindset for some participants in the present study. Counselor educators can do this by stressing the need for

graduates to continue engaging in formal training as well as informal professional development efforts such as reading and consultation.

Counselor educators can provide students with specific resources and create opportunities for students to organize these resources in such a way that they will be able to easily access them later (e.g., assigning a resource portfolio). Educators may also aid counseling students in their transition to training in the context of supervision, perhaps providing tips for initiating supervision relationships and accessing effective developmental support with clinical supervisors. Further, counseling instructors can discuss how graduates may initiate consultation with former professors (i.e., explain their availability, level of openness, and preferred methods of contact) and peers.

Counselor educators can also integrate discussions relating to network relationships in academic classrooms. For example, an instructor might present a case study involving a new counselor who feels isolated and overwhelmed and ask students to consider how the counselor might seek out resources and support. While this type of discussion might be appropriate in multiple courses throughout graduate programs, internship courses may be particularly well-suited for these discussions for at least two reasons: 1) these courses typically occur toward the end of academic programs, when students are preparing to transition into the workforce; and 2) internship students are concurrently working in real-life counseling settings, where they are exposed to the challenges of practice as well as opportunities to foster supportive professional relationships. Discussions and assignments relating to developmental networks during internship courses could challenge counseling students to closely consider developmental tasks involved in their quickly-approaching transition to practice and make gradual preparations to meet their developmental needs during this transitional period.

In addition to discussing potential challenges of early practice, counselor educators can prompt students to consider their existing developmental supports and how they might build and maintain effective networks. This may involve encouraging students to increase awareness of their interpersonal styles. Increasing self-awareness is a crucial aspect of counselor training and development (Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2003). Students' personal styles of interacting and relating with others may be framed as a key piece of self-awareness that impacts not only one's clinical approach but also one's methods of building network relationships. Increasing this awareness may empower beginning counselors to build on personal strengths and monitor areas needing growth as they form developmental relationships after graduating. Counselor educators may facilitate this awareness by including interpersonal styles and network relationships as a part of classroom assignments and discussions already geared at increasing self-awareness. For instance, an instructor may ask students to consider the roles of supportive relationships in their lives as a part of a reflection paper assignment.

Counselor educators can also assist counselor trainees to begin building developmental supports while they are still in school. This may involve encouraging students to seek out opportunities for supportive relationships and/or directly providing opportunities to build supportive relationships. For example, Dana and Hank both described meaningful ongoing professional relationships with professionals whom they met while fulfilling a class assignment. Opportunities to meet and build relationships with practicing counselors in the community may be one way to foster developmental relationships. Other participants discussed important relationships with both former professors and former classmates from their graduate programs. Opportunities to build lasting relationships with faculty and other students may offer long-term benefits for counselor development. For this reason, multiple participants expressed their

appreciation and preference for a "cohort model" in graduate programs. Faculty and administrators may consider implementing a cohort model or applying creative strategies for building networks when cohort models are not feasible.

Clinical Professionals

Clinical supervisors, administrative supervisors, and other clinical professionals who may assist the development of beginning counselors can contribute to beginning counselors' development by establishing environments that foster growth and offer direct developmental support to new counselors. Several participants discussed factors within the workplace environment that facilitated professional growth and formation of developmental relationships. These included opportunities to connect and communicate with colleagues in both structured (e.g., treatment team meetings, clinical collaboration) and unstructured capacities (e.g., open doors, "welcoming" environment). Further, some participants expressed their perception that these environmental factors stemmed from administrative attitudes and policies. For example, Ellen expressed that an administrative supervisor helped "set the tone" of a welcoming environment and relationship. Likewise, Carla and Kacie discussed supervisors and colleagues who verbally expressed their willingness to help during their first week at work and consistently checked in for several weeks afterward.

Supervisors, administrators, and clinicians may consider how they can contribute to a welcoming and collaborative environmental presence. For example, these established professionals can intentionally create opportunities to interact with new clinicians in an informal and ongoing manner (e.g., making a point to stop by a new clinician's office and talk, asking appropriate questions related to new counselors' lives on professional and personal levels). Supporters may also disclose trials they faced when they were starting out in order to relate with

beginning counselors' experiences and normalize anxiety and challenges of the transition. Finally, established professionals can contribute to a welcoming social-professional environment by making specific offers of help to new professionals regarding pragmatic (e.g., filling out paperwork, using computer system) or clinical concerns. This may include asking new counselors about their clinical interests and areas of focus and facilitating access to related resources.

Clinical professionals may also support beginning counselors by offering direct developmental support. For example, several participants discussed that they valued having access to other professionals' libraries. Established professionals may grant new counselors access to their collection of resources and, perhaps, even provide recommendations of specific books or trainings that may benefit beginning counselors in their development. Clinical supervisors, in particular, may be well-positioned to understand and respond to beginning counselors' developmental challenges and experiences. Multiple participants stated that they benefited from supervisory interactions that involved, on some level, both professional and personal concerns. Clinical supervisors can facilitate these discussions by regularly checking in regarding beginning counselors' overall wellbeing, including the state of their relational supports in multiple domains of life.

Established professionals in any role may benefit from considering potential challenges beginning counselors are experiencing (e.g., disconnection, self-doubt, adjusting to pragmatic demands) and supportive offerings that may enhance beginning counselors' growth experiences (e.g., approachability, genuineness, security, and means to coping). At the very least, these considerations may provide clinical professionals with a starting place for assessing the needs of and initiating developmental conversations with beginning counselors.

Counseling Students and Beginning Counselors

Counseling students and beginning counselors can use these findings as a prompt for reflecting on their own experiences and increasing their self-awareness regarding interpersonal styles and existing developmental relationships. Counseling students and new professionals may also consider how their cultural, geographical, and workplace contexts may shape their professional experiences and developmental relationships. In particular, counseling students may seek to foster supportive professional relationships while in graduate school in preparation for challenges of disconnection they see on the horizon following graduation. In the present study, Kacie discussed using this strategy, as she maintained an important connection with a university supervisor when she moved to begin working in a new, rural area.

The findings of the present study also offer counseling students and beginning counselors a foundational prompt from which they can reflect on developmental needs and the values they hold within developmental relationships. They may consider the roles of their current developmental relationships, the boundaries in place within their networks, and how these roles and boundaries may change as they continue to move forward through developmental transitions. For instance, advanced counseling students may write down a list of supportive relationships and note: 1) role(s) each relationship fills in their development; 2) how each relationship may change as they transition from school to the workplace; 3) which relationships and roles they believe will be most important upon entering the workforce; and 4) how they may foster and maintain connection with crucial developmental supports. Such an exercise may be well-suited for a classroom assignment or a workshop or supervision activity.

Finally, the study findings emphasize the importance of beginning counselors taking initiative in developing their own supportive interpersonal networks. Both Ellen and Kacie

discussed regularly creating a reason (e.g., asking a work-related question, following up on a previous conversation) to initiate conversations with coworkers. Ellen explained that, as a typically introverted person, her natural inclination was to remain in her quiet office. However, she intentionally reached out to coworkers because she valued professional relationships and believed these relationships would later be important for meeting other needs. Dana, on the other hand, discussed fostering ongoing relationships with members of her church and community. She stated that these relationships enriched her life and enhanced her sense of competence and capacity to care for clients. Beginning counselors can take intentional steps to create and strengthen supportive relationships in multiple areas of life. This may involve initiating regular contact with workplace professionals, increasing involvement with community organizations, or spending more time with non-professional relationships. In essence, beginning counselors can bolster the strength and effectiveness of their developmental network relationships by prioritizing interpersonal relationships as part of their busy schedules. In the following section, I recommend areas and approaches for future research.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study served as an initial exploration of beginning counselors' developmental networks and interpersonal support, and included only a small sample of beginning counselors. Future studies can build on this exploration by collecting data from a more diverse sample set, with particular emphasis on geographical, racial, and ethnic diversity. Further, future research may include perspectives of counselors at different developmental stages (e.g., counseling students and advanced professionals) in order to understand how developmental relationships and needs change over time. Adding diversity and/or additional professional development stages

in future studies can work to further triangulate the findings of the present study and continually sharpen understandings of beginning counselors' interpersonal needs and trends.

Another potential direction for building on the findings of this study is to examine beginning counselors' developmental relationships more closely with Higgins and Kram's 92001) developmental network typology. Future researchers could use a questionnaire and analytic procedures that more rigidly follow the constructs of developmental network theory. This approach would be more limited in focus than the present study, but may yield more specific and nuanced results regarding participants' developmental patterns. Future studies may also utilize quantitative approaches to measure the constructs presented in the present study's findings. This would involve assessing beginning counselors' developmental networks and relationships on a much broader scale and findings could have significantly greater potential for generalizability.

Future studies may also explore specific interactional patterns and decisions beginning counselors use and assess the effectiveness of these patterns and decisions. This practical focus may be able to provide a sort of "best practices" for counselors building relational networks, which could inform counselor educators and supervisors as they train and influence new professionals. Finally, future research may access the perspectives of the *developers* within counselors' developmental relationships. Researchers may explore how developers (e.g., counselor educators, supervisors, colleagues, and personal relationships) perceive their role in developmental networks and/or the types of support they offer. Dobrow et al. (2012) suggested developmental network research that examines how developers' own development and wellbeing is impacted by serving as a developer. Exploring the perspectives of developers in addition to beginning counselors could provide a fuller, broader picture of developmental connection and

influence within the counseling field. Further, gathering the perspective of *both* beginning counselors *and* their developers may mitigate limitations of participant recall and awareness (i.e., minimize blind spots of a single perspective).

Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed how the study findings addressed the principle research questions. I also discussed findings in the context of Ronnestad and Skovholt's (2003) theory of counselor development and Higgins and Kram's (2001) developmental network theoretical model. Next, I described several limitations involved in the study and provided final personal reflections regarding my experiences formulating and carrying out study procedures. I then discussed implications for the study findings for counselor educators, supervisors and other influential clinical professionals, and beginning counselors themselves. Finally, I provided several recommendations for future research regarding the developmental networks and interpersonal relationships of beginning counselors.

Overall, this study makes a substantial contribution to the literature as the first to apply the developmental network perspective to the experiences of beginning counselors. Further, the study findings provide a broad, yet detailed, description of beginning counselors' growth experiences, developmental challenges, and patterns of interpersonal connection. The collection of beginning counselors' perspectives on these developmental processes is significant because there is a scarcity of pre-existing research focusing on this particular period of counselor development. I am hopeful that future researchers will build on the findings of this study and continue to increase understanding of counselors' developmental relationships. I also hope that counselor educators, supervisors, and other counseling professionals will consider these findings useful as they engage and mold students and beginning counselors.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Screening Questions for Initial Email Responses

1. What graduate degree(s) have you earned? Please provide degree, major, and concentration (e.g. MS, counseling, clinical mental health)?
2. Was your primary institution CACREP accredited at the time of your graduation?
3. When did you graduate with your master's degree in counseling (month and year)?
4. Have you engaged in at least part-time practice (average of 10+ hours per week) as a clinical mental health counselor consistently since graduating from your master's in clinical mental health counseling program (i.e., no breaks longer than four consecutive months)?
5. Are you currently enrolled and actively participating in a graduate school program?

Appendix B

Developmental Networks and Interpersonal Support of Beginning Counselors
Consent Form

You are invited to participate in an interview for a research study. My name is Nathan West, and I am a 4th year doctoral student at the University of Tennessee. I am conducting this interview as a part of my dissertation for completion of a PhD in Counselor Education.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to describe the interpersonal supports of beginning counselors as they transition into practice and develop as counseling professionals. I am interested in how they engage in supportive relationships and perceive the professional-social environmental factors influencing their development.

Procedures

This interview will include open-ended questions about the impact of multiple relationships on your development as a counselor since graduating with a master's degree in counseling. The interview will last approximately 60 minutes. Our conversation will be audio-recorded and transcribed into a text document. Additionally, I might take notes during our interview for later reference.

Confidentiality

I will present information gathered from the interview, possibly including direct quotes, as a part of the final study results and discussion. However, I will take rigorous measures to protect your identity. These measures will include replacing your name and other identifying information with a pseudonym and storing information from the interview on a password-protected computer. Further, I will keep paper-copies of the interview transcription in a locked box, to which only I will have the key. Only my dissertation chair and I will have access to the full set of data from the interview. The audio-recordings will be deleted after they have been transcribed and checked for accuracy. I will maintain interview transcription copies going forward for potential use in future studies. I will label transcriptions with a pseudonym and continually protect these files in the manners described above (i.e., electronic files on a password-protected computer; physical copies in a locked box).
In order to maintain confidentiality, I will not be using specific names or identifying information in the research report. I will present demographic information in aggregate form and fully omit the name of your graduate program and employing agency. I ask that you refrain from using full names or identifying information during the course of this interview to further protect your identity and the identity of others.

Risks, Benefits, & Rights

While there are no perceived direct risks involved with this interview, it is possible that you may feel uncomfortable while discussing some of the information. If you do not feel comfortable

moving forward at any point, you have the right to stop the interview or audio recording at any time. You also have the right to withdraw from the study after the completion of the interview, thereby eliminating my permission to present the information you have provided. If you decide to stop the interview or withdraw from the study, I will respect and comply with your request. You also have the right to obtain a copy of the interview transcript, if you wish to do so. Although this study is not expected to provide direct benefits to you, your participation will help create new understandings about counselor development. This understanding may be helpful to those involved in counselor training and development, including counselor educators, clinical and administrative supervisors, and counselors themselves. Further, improved counselor training and support may lead to improved client care.

Compensation

As a participant in this study, you will receive one $15 gift card. You must participate in the interview in order to receive the gift card. If you begin the interview but do not finish, you will still receive the $15 gift card.

Contact Information

If you have any questions or concerns about the interview, feel free to contact me by email at nwest10@vols.utk.edu. Dr. Joel Diambra, Associate Professor of Counselor Education at UT, will serve as my dissertation chair and faculty advisor throughout this process. He will offer me feedback and work to ensure that I carry out this study in an ethical and appropriate manner. You may contact Dr. Diambra by email at jdiambra@utk.edu.

If you have questions about your rights as a participant, you may contact the University of Tennessee Office of Research Compliance Officer at (865) 974-2474 or nobles@utk.edu.

Consent

By signing this document, I indicate that I have read and understand the above information, and I am offering my consent to participate in this study.

Participant: _____ Date:_____

Interviewer: _____ Date: _____

Appendix C

Nathan West, M.S.

Interview Protocol: Developmental Networks and Interpersonal Support of Beginning Counselors

Interview Time: Date:

Location:

Interviewer:

Participant:

Contact Method: In Person Web-Conference

Introductory Statement

My name is Nathan West. I am a 4th year doctoral student at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. I am conducting this interview as a part of my dissertation for completion of a PhD in Counselor Education. The overarching focus of this interview is on the relationships and interpersonal connections that have influenced your development as a clinical mental health counselor following graduation from your master's program. The interview should last approximately 60. Your participation is completely voluntary, and you have the right to stop the interview and/or recording at any time. The recording will be transcribed, but I will remove your name and identifying information before presenting this information to anyone else. Do you have any questions or concerns? Are you ready to begin the interview?

Demographic Questions

Age: Gender: Race and/or Ethnicity:

Socio-Economic Background:

At which program did you graduate with your masters in counseling?

How many jobs have you held since graduating?

How long have you served in your current position?

After graduating, did you take a job at your internship site?

Would you describe your work setting as urban, rural, suburban, etc.?

Briefly describe the agency you currently work for.

Briefly describe the population you serve.

Interview Questions/Prompts

1. Tell me about your professional development since graduating from your masters in counseling program.
2. In what ways have interpersonal relationships impacted (or not impacted) your professional development since transitioning from graduate school to the workforce?
3. Are there individuals who have been particularly impactful on your development?
    a. Please tell me about these individuals.
    b. How did these relationships come about? Who was most active in forming this relationship? Identify the factors that brought you together.
    c. Do you consider any of these individuals a "mentor"? Tell me what "mentor" means to you.
4. Some researchers have described supportive relationships (or "mentors") as a constellation (or "network") of support.
    a. Tell me how this resonates regarding your experience(s).

   b. How would you describe or portray your constellation/network? (A pen and paper may be provided to you if you would like to construct a visual representation)*
   c. Please talk about the role(s) that you perceive each mentor fills.
   d. What is the nature of your contact with these individuals?
      i. Through what medium(s) do you communicate with them (e.g., in person, by phone, via email, etc.)?
      ii. Please talk about frequency of contact.
      iii. Describe the content of your interactions with each person (e.g., topics, issues)
      iv. Identify content differences and similarities between individuals.
5. Describe some of the needs you experienced as you began practicing as a counselor after graduate school. How have you attempted to meet these needs through your supportive relationships?
   a. Describe successful and/or unsuccessful experiences.
   b. Explain qualities/characteristics that are most helpful.
   c. How have your needs and related interpersonal experiences changed in the time since graduating?
6. Can you identify some major turning points, transitional experiences, or milestones in your professional development since graduating? How were your interpersonal relationships involved in (or not involved in) these experiences?
7. Describe the general social environment of the counseling workplace setting(s) you have worked in since graduation.
   a. Discuss how these settings impacted your development as a counselor.

*****If participants request further clarification regarding the meaning of "developmental constellation/network," I will provide the definition I used for the term "developmental network" in my dissertation proposal:

"For the purpose of this study, the term developmental network will refer to *the surrounding people whom a central individual recognizes as actively involved and purposefully assisting in their career development at a given time*" (West, p. 21)

Appendix D

Recruitment Email

Hi,

I am a doctoral candidate in the Counselor Education PhD program at the University of Tennessee. I am conducting a research study for completion of my dissertation. I am currently in need of participants!

I am studying the social/interpersonal experiences of beginning clinical mental health counselors as they transition from graduate school to counseling practice. Participation will consist of one qualitative interview. All participants will receive a $15 gift card.

Participants must meet the following criteria:

- Graduated from a CACREP-Accredited master's degree in counseling program within the past 2 years
- Consistently practiced since graduating (minimum of 10 hours/week; No breaks longer than 4 months)

If you are interested or you have any questions about the study, please feel free to contact me via email at nwest10@vols.utk.edu.

Thank you and I look forward to hearing from you!

Nathan West

Vita

Nathan B. West was born in Florence, AL to Keith and Rhonda West. He attended Central School in Lauderdale County, AL from Kindergarten through completion of his high school diploma in 2007. He then enrolled at Freed Hardeman University, where he earned a Bachelor of Arts in Bible in 2011 and a Master of Science in Clinical Mental Health Counseling in 2013. Nathan's professional experiences include over four years in student ministry roles, four years as a mental health counselor in a variety of clinical settings, and two and a half years as the student coordinator of an outreach and service learning program for children affected by grief experiences. He is a member of multiple professional counseling organizations, including the American Counseling Association, the Association for Counselor Education and Supervision, and Chi Sigma Iota. During his doctoral studies at the University of Tennessee, Nathan received the University of Tennessee Counselor Education program Outstanding Leadership Award and the Upsilon Theta Chapter of Chi Sigma Iota Outstanding Service to the Chapter Award. Nathan also presented at local, regional, state, and national conferences during the course of his doctoral program. In the immediate future, Nathan will remain in the Knoxville, TN area as he continues practicing as a mental health counselor and begins serving as an adjunct professor at local universities.